RELIGION AND THE MYSTERIOUS

F. H. BRABANT

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Religion and the mysterious

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RELIGION AND THE MYSTERIOUS

THE

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BY

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

A FEW words seem desirable to explain the publication of a series of books, some of which may appear to differ widely in character from others, under the common title of the Anglican Library of Faith and Thought. The general intention is to offer a systematic treatment of some of the facts of religious experience and history, in such a manner as to illustrate the principles involved or implied in them. The authors invited to contribute to this series are men of thought, who would all attach a high value to the historical continuity and intellectual tradition of the Christian Church, but are at the same time fully conscious of the need for independent judgment and for sympathetic understanding of modern problems and processes. The books are not technical handbooks, but aim at presenting facts intelligently to the educated public, without any sacrifice of interest and attractiveness.

It should be said that the original suggestion of the series was made by the Literature Committee of the English Church Union, a body of some fifty well-known scholars of the Anglican Communion. But the Union assumes no responsibility for any more than the projection of the series and the appointment, jointly with Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co., of the Editor. Detailed responsibility rests entirely with

the several authors, subject only to the Editor's general oversight; and that oversight has been exercised of set purpose with a view to the production of works which in the Editor's judgment are of value in tending to promote clear thought upon important subjects, rather than with a view to obtaining finality of statement upon matters in which a claim to finality might possibly savour of intellectual presumption.

The Editor ventures to express the hope that when its purpose is understood in this sense the series may prove of real value in a generation which from its various circumstances both needs and demands clear and serious thinking about the fundamental concerns of religion.

G. L. P.

PREFACE

THE title of this book suggests two subjects—Religion and the Mysterious, and we shall begin by considering them apart. The opening pages are frankly secular; they seek to trace through the stages of curiosity and wonder the part which Mystery and the desire for Mystery play in art and knowledge. It is not till that part has been defined that we can pass on to consider the special interest which Religion takes in the mysterious. Looked at like this, the subject is an enormous one, and I fear that this little book only offers some disconnected peeps at Religion from this point of view. However, it is sometimes interesting to look at familiar things from a special angle. I can hardly expect that anyone will find much that is new in the treatment of Religion; I can only hope that the angle may be found worth looking from.

The mysterious element in Religion is often singled out for attack; the man of common sense, who is apt to pride himself on the clearness of his ideas, complains that he is asked to believe unintelligible propositions (such as the Doctrine of the Trinity); that he is refused answers to the most pressing questions (as in the "Mystery of Evil"); that he is told inexplicable stories about Miracles, and asked

to admire strange and abnormal experiences that are called mystical.

But Christianity has also been attacked for having its dogmas too clear cut, for being too cock-sure in its teaching, for being too well informed about God's intentions—that is for not leaving enough room for mystery. It is sometimes the very same people who accuse it of being at once dogmatic and unintelligible.

It will be our task to try to discover what is the proper place for mystery, to avoid the cloudy muddle-headedness which can only say, "It is all very difficult," and also the vulgar pertness which says, "We can explain everything."

The book may be accused (like the defendant in "Trial by Jury") of "Breathing concentrated Otto," and it is clear that most of the hares it chases were started by his "Idea of the Holy"; I have generally avoided his technical terms because I think them rather narrow and specialised. The mysterious is and should be treated as wider than the "Numinous." But the absence of more continual references to him is due to the fact that his influence is everywhere.

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PART ONE

MYSTERY IN LIFE

WHEN we say that life is full of mystery, we do not simply mean that there are plenty of things which we do not know. The very derivation of the word has other and far less prosaic associations; it is religious in origin and suggests the secret, whispered by the priest to the initiated believer at some midnight ceremony. In the most interesting and important cases of the mysterious, the attraction which it exercises is of a curious kind; it is often mixed with fear and repulsion and provokes contradictory emotions of curiosity and acquiescence. In one sense it is a challenge demanding a solution; in another it repels the idea of understanding. Dr. Jacks has drawn a picture of the Isles of Omniscience, where no secrets are left, and has shown what a nightmare such a country would be, and even such a lover of logical coherence as Bradley has expressed the horror he would feel if Reality turned out to be "a bloodless ballet of categories."

It is this complex reaction to mystery which we shall study first.

The whole phenomenon is very distressing to a conscientious intellectualist; can there really be a case in which I do not want an explanation? If so, how degrading for a rational animal like Man! The

fact does indeed deserve close study; there seems at first sight no a priori reason why the unknown should be charged with these mysterious qualities. It might have left us quite indifferent; it might have simply stimulated the desire to clear up the problem as soon as possible—but that the unknown, simply in virtue of its being unknown, should have this power to attract and satisfy is what we should not have expected. For example, however desirable it may be that the phenomena of haunted houses should be scientifically investigated, who does not feel a chill of bereavement at the thought that our tales of mystery and horror should yield their place to frigid reports of experts from the Society for Psychical Research?

Is this only a discreditable survival of primitive fears, or does it throw any light on the proper attitude of the human spirit to Reality? In the first section of this book we shall consider some examples of this form of experience, adding a short note upon some possible psychological explanations of it.

CHAPTER I

CURIOSITY

THE first effect which the unknown has upon us may be to leave us perfectly indifferent, and we shall perhaps best approach the subject of Curiosity by contrasting it with this indifference, the attitude which is expressed in the phrase, "I don't know, I can't know and I don't want to know."

It might be said that ideally we ought to want to know everything; for instance, the true historian should wish to know at what precise moment every inhabitant of Great Britain got out of bed on (say) the 1st of March, 1424, what they had for breakfast, and the exact words they used during the day. He should be inconsolable because these facts cannot now be recovered; as Mr. Chesterton says somewhere, "There are no uninteresting facts; there are only uninterested people."

Whether this is literally so may be doubted, when we consider how impossible the task of the historian would be if time and his sources had not already produced a first sifting of the facts and also how important is the part played by forgetting in keeping our attention healthy and alert. In any case, for the majority of people, such unknown facts are not

mysterious; our ignorance produces no reaction in us, any faint interest we might have had in them being extinguished by the certainty that they are now unascertainable.

Opposed to this we have Curiosity. Why should we have this desire to know, and why should it attach itself to certain subjects? It is not possible to find (as the Pragmatists would wish) any lurking practical aim in all the cases; if you ask someone why he devotes himself to an obscure and repellent period in history, in which he is never likely to achieve fame or popularity, he can only say, "It interests me." Nothing more can be said; it seems a pure desire to know for the sake of knowing.

Even the lover of gossip is not necessarily malicious; he does not always want to ruin anyone's character; only it is intolerable to him that there should be any corner of his neighbour's life which he should not seem to have completely explored.

So far is it from being true that Curiosity is always useful that Society often discourages it; proverbial wisdom tells us that Curiosity killed a cat and that we ought to mind our own business. Religion has been especially hard upon it; sometimes it has been spoken of as an audacious attempt to pry into matters which concern God alone; so St. Augustine reports the answer often made to the question, "What was God doing before He made the world?" "Making Hell for people who ask impertinent questions"; at other times it has seemed a waste of time that should be spent on working out our own salvation; so the author of the *Imitation* says (Chap. III), "What is the good

of continually cavilling about hidden and abstruse matters, for our ignorance of which, at the Day of Judgment, we shall not be blamed ? "

This leads us on to what is for us the most relevant fact about Curiosity ; if it were merely a thirst to know the truth, satisfied the more it learns and yet ever desiring more, we should just write it down as a necessary spur to knowledge, very much as Adventurousness is a stimulus to action. But there are facts that prevent our explaining it so simply.

In the first place, one would have expected that it would have been keener where there was a chance of a solution, and that it would have cooled down as the probability of an answer receded further and further away. But this is not the case ; I suppose that most people cannot help being more curious as to what happens after death (even though they are sincerely convinced that we cannot know and even that it would be bad for us to know) than they are about a Crossword puzzle, where they are sure of the answer the next day ; this unreasonable desire is what moralists and spiritual directors condemn as *idle* curiosity.

Secondly, we have to note our curiosity about unpleasant facts. This is never by sincere people confused with the desire for knowledge for its own sake which is quite pure. The attractiveness of what we fear is like the " fascination " of the Evil Eye ; it is illustrated by the story (which Hazlitt used as an argument against Hedonism) of the timid person, who, left all night alone with a corpse, was found tightly clasping it in the morning. This

attractiveness of the unpleasant is enormously helped by mystery; for many people the glamour of the obscene is simply that it is whispered about in corners; it would lose half its interest if it were talked about openly and naturally. The secrecy and unpleasantness combine to form what we call *morbid* curiosity.

Thirdly, Curiosity is not necessarily a desire for truth; it readily swallows down fiction, if only it is strange and rare; it prefers an exciting legend to dull, prosaic facts. We have to distinguish this from the scientist's pursuit of knowledge; the astronomer's wonder and delight when

"A new planet swims into his ken"

is of a different quality from the greedy love of sensation, which lives in an atmosphere of astonishing rumours and unaccountable happenings. Doubtless an indulgent Providence has provided that many facts should turn out to be strange and thrilling when discovered; to a rightly appreciative taste the search for a new star or a new species of seaweed is as exciting as a detective story; still we must admit that we do find many facts which disappoint us, because they do not satisfy our *romantic* curiosity.

The varying uses of the word are also instructive; the Latin adjective "curiosus" is derived from "cura" (trouble or pains) and is only used in the subjective sense as an attitude of mind; it has two senses both of which start as innocent and even praiseworthy; then self-consciousness begins to creep in and the word degenerates; thus (*a*) it may mean "diligent, taking a lot of trouble," but in the

end it implies fussiness. So Quintilian (VIII, 55), speaking of over-elaboration in literary expression, says, " It differs from the right treatment much as the ' curiosus ' differs from the hard-working man or as superstition differs from Religion." An interesting intermediate example is the well-known praise of Horace for his " curiosa felicitas " where the word implies the self-consciousness of the artist who is justified in spending much labour to round off a phrase.[1]

(*b*) The second and more familiar sense is that of eagerness in inquiring into a thing ; this again may be perfectly harmless, but the word ends by becoming almost technical for secret spies.[2]

The use of the word in English is complicated by the fact that we also use the word objectively, of things as well as people ; we speak of a " curious " piece of work or of a museum of Curiosities ; here it means carefully or exquisitely finished or else having something singular about it. The subjective and objective senses have reacted on one another ; thus the objective sense is applied to a person when we calls him a " curioso," i.e. a person who delights in exquisite things, while the subjective sense of liking strange things is transferred to objects that satisfy the liking (a " curious " story or a " curiously-shaped " tree).

The objective use of the word seems always to have remained good or at least neutral ; in its sub-

[1] It is difficult to translate, as the two words are paradoxically opposite ; " his laboured naturalness " gives the paradox, if not quite the sense.

[2] The Code of Justinian has a heading " De curiosis at stationariis "—" On the secret police."

jective sense it implies self-consciousness, meaning either over-subtle or more commonly one who wants to know too much.[1]

All this helps to bring out the point, which in a sense will be before us during all our discussion of the mysterious. Even here at its lowest level, Curiosity, we can see that there is more than an intellectual desire to know. If it were that and nothing more, we should desist where a solution is impossible; we should desire to know all the facts equally and nothing but the facts, but we have seen that Curiosity can attach itself in a special way to insoluble mysteries, to unhealthy obscenities and to marvellous legends. Indeed if curiosity were simply a desire for the truth, how could we account for the use of the word in a bad sense and the warnings of moralists against it?

What part then does Mystery play in exciting curiosity? Here we come upon an important fact; a mystery is not something we don't know and want to know; it is not quite the same as a riddle or a problem or a puzzle[2]; it must have some quality of strangeness which fascinates the imagination. The fact energes from the two senses of Curiosity—one in which it is directed to fact, the other in which it is rather an appetite for the marvellous and unusual.[3]

[1] Compare the use of the word "exquisite" which from meaning "carefully chosen" has a flavour of over-subtlety and is definitely bad when we use it of people (He is an exquisite). We have no use of the word in English corresponding to the Latin sense of "fussy."

[2] Thus a "Mystery-story" (if it deserves the title) should contain not only a problem, but a *strange* problem.

[3] Whether, on the whole, the marvellous and the true do coincide is a question upon which proverbial wisdom speaks with two voices. We say "strange *but* true," and yet that

The distinction between them is this. In curiosity of the purely intellectual kind, we want to know, and when we have discovered what we want to know, there is the joy of having discovered ; we may be aware that on the horizon there are new problems to be faced, but for all that we are glad, for the moment, that we have understood.

But in the other kind of curiosity, where the appeal is rather to the imagination, we only half want to know. The attractiveness of the repulsive is that it is unusual, *outré*, uncanny (that is " unknown ") ; the moment it becomes normal, it loses its prestige like a ghost that should forget that to preserve its dignity it must disappear. So the marvellous interests us because it seems to have no explanation. Our curiosity may want to know more ; it does not want to know why ; for explained away the object ceases to thrill us.

Here then we meet for the first time what we shall find to be an important element in the mysterious—that the mind wants to know and yet does not want to know ; it lives in the twilight among shadows which half hint at what they never define beneath the witchery of the moon's uncertain light.

It may be said by the Intellectualist that such primitive credulity is the mother of superstition and ignorance ; he may quote scornfully Tacitus, " Omne ignotum pro magnifico " ; the moralist may implore its indifference to truth ; the spiritual director may denounce it as the product of an un-

" truth is stranger than fiction "—a maxim which one always feels must have been invented in the Wild West by a cow-boy, who had no access to libraries.

disciplined and unhealthy imagination. We are not at present concerned with moral judgments of any kind; we are only trying to observe the facts.

CHAPTER II

DOUBT AND REVOLT

IN this stage the desire to know has come up against a barrier, which it cannot pass; it may be the baffled curiosity of a mathematician before an insoluble problem; or of the scientist who cannot get his calculations to work out right, but the cases that concern us are those in which the mystery is moral; we are perplexed by some personal suffering or bewildered by the general spectacle of the world; it is at such moments that we easily pass to moods of doubt or revolt. Unable to find an answer we shake our fist at Reality; like Ivan in the Brothers Karamazoff, we say, "I believe in God, but I cannot accept the world that He has made."[1]

This feeling of resentment is quite different from the genial scepticism which confronted with questions it cannot answer takes a pinch of snuff and disclaims responsibility with a comfortable "Who knows?" for such cultured indifference mysteries

[1] In a vigorous and sincere record of spiritual experience, like the Psalter, we find that even the trusting servant of Jehovah can use language which sounds like resentment, "Up Lord, why sleepest Thou? Awake and be not absent from us for ever." We get a curious mingling of revolt and acquiescence in the epitaph on a young child, "If these things ought to be, My God, I leave it all to Thee."

do not exist at all, but the burning sense of despair before a door which will not open, is far more complex; it is not that we just lose our temper because the sum will not work out right; it has beneath all its fury that sense of the greatness of life which it is the special function of Mystery to teach us. It bears unwilling witness to the greatness of the universe or at least of the mind that criticises and defies it. Without this deep sense of mystery the great works of moral scepticism and moral revolt would be nothing more than a plaintive whining over personal grievances.

Let us take three famous examples from literature. Omar Khayyam might seem at first glance to be a work of cultured indifference (pretending very hard to be uncultured), but it is clearly more than a vulgar drinking song; it is redeemed by a quality of sadness; we are not deceived by the air of jolly recklessness; the clinking of glasses does not drown that cry of astonishment that life should be so empty. It would take a brand of wine more potent than this world knows to make the singer forget the bitter blasphemy of

"Man's forgiveness give—and take"

or the pathetic longing to "grasp the scheme of things entire," and "mould it nearer to the heart's desire."

The poet has given up all hope of solving the riddle of life, but we feel that he has not quite given up the belief that there is a solution somewhere.

"There was a Door, to which I found no key;
There was a Veil, past which I could not see."

There is still for him some mystery at the heart of

things and the gay Epicurean is heart-broken because he cannot find it.

Our second example of a mind baffled before the Unknown is Hamlet; it is true that no simple phrases like resentment or scepticism or revolt represent so rich and varied a character. But he is clearly a soul pre-eminently susceptible to the mystery of life and paralysed by it.[1] He sometimes submits, sometimes rebels, sometimes procrastinates, but he gives always the impression that he is in the grip of something great and formidable. His failure is tragedy, not farce. So in the soliloquy, "To be or not to be," the sense of the mystery of death though it "puzzles the will" enlarges the imagination; Hamlet feels the thrill of awe before the unknown, the fear of the supernatural; the fear is not of semi-physical punishment (as in Claudio's only less famous outburst in "Measure for Measure"), but of the vague and imponderable "something after death," "what dreams may come," "evils that we know not of." Nor is it moral fear of penalties for misdeeds; only a misunderstanding of the phrase, "Conscience makes cowards of us all,"[2] could suggest that, No, the fear is pure terror before the Numinous as Otto would call it. In a larger sense it is "religious fear," and Voltaire quite misunderstands it when he supposes it to mean ordinary cowardice:

[1] Of course Hamlet's scepticism is partly due to the will; to laziness and indecision heightened by love of speculation and moral disillusionment; after all Hamlet *did* know that there was another world; he is playing with intellectual doubts as an excuse for not killing himself and hugging the idea that the ghost himself might be a delusion.

[2] "Conscience" of course means "too much thinking."

" Mais le scrupule parle et nous crie ' Arrêtez '
Il défend a nos mains cet heureux homicide
Et d'un héros guerrier fait un chrétien timide."[1]

Our third example (the opening scene of " Faust ") is rather different, because the sense of frustration is more intellectual. Part of his torment is the failure to understand the secrets of the universe :

" And here I am at last a very fool
With useless learning curst
No wiser than at first
And now to feel that nothing can be known ! "[2]

When the Spirit, whom he summons, scorns to converse with him :

" Man, thou art as the spirit thou comprehendest,
Not me."

Faust is overpowered with confusion ; he cries :

" Not thee !
Whom then ? I image of Deity
And not even such as thee."

The humiliation eats into his soul :

" Image of God ! I thought that I had been
Sublimed from earth, no more a child of clay
Doomed for such dreams presumptuous to atone
All by one word of thunder overthrown."

Then he meditates suicide as an act of audacity which will, as it were, claim God's attention :

" Find life where others fear to die,
Take measure of thy strength and burst,
Burst wide the gates of liberty ;
Show by man's act man's spirit durst

[1] Lettres Philosophiques XVIII, Hamlet is really paying a tribute to religion, not attacking it.
[2] From Dr. Anster's translation.

Meet God's own eye and wax not dim,
Stand fearless, face to face with Him."

Here we have a spirit consumed with pride on the edge of presumptuous rebellion ; the thirst for knowledge is really a thirst for power ; he cannot bear the thought that there are spirits who despise him and he will barter his soul to secure a supernatural servant who will obey him, though that servant be a devil.

There can be no manner of doubt that Gœthe's treatment depends upon a conception of the depth and richness of the universe ; here is no baffled student, breaking up his instruments in a temper ; here is the struggle of the spirit of man conscious of his greatness and loath to recognise that Reality is greater.

This is the point we should notice ; we saw that Curiosity was a great deal more complicated a thing than a mere desire to know more facts ; we see here that the negative state of defeated curiosity is more than a feeling of bewilderment or anger because we cannot penetrate certain facts. If it is only that, we cannot describe the unknown as a mystery ; conversationally no doubt we may say, "It is a mystery to me where he bought that hat," but we are consciously over-stating[1] ; a mystery must be not only something concealed but also something of vast import.

So for the cynic who regards life as empty and trivial there are no mysteries, except perhaps the fact that there are still people simple enough to

[1] The word mystery has not become completely degraded like "awful" ; it is saved perhaps by sensational fiction.

expect anything from it. Only one who ardently believes in the goodness of things can properly speak of the " mystery " of pain and suffering ; only to one who profoundly loves human nature can evil really seem " mysterious." All the great cries of bewilderment and revolt in human history come from a faith that may be dying but is not yet quite dead.

CHAPTER III

FEAR AND WONDER

FROM the sense of greatness, which accompanies revolt against the unknown (if it is to be more than a statement of personal grievance), it is not difficult to pass to the next stage, that of fear and wonder. Neither word must be taken too widely; there is nothing significant in the crying of a child in the dark or the astonishment of a yokel who sees an aeroplane for the first time; we are speaking of a fear and wonder charged with a certain quality of fascination, to which the human spirit submits and which in a sense it enjoys. In the first two stages of man's attitude to mystery, we have already seen a certain element of acquiescence; curiosity loves the riddle almost as much as the solution; rebellion and bewilderment, in their loudest moments of passion, still pay Reality the compliment of taking it seriously. In the third stage we find this element predominating. The unknown now attracts because it is unknown. This attitude is best studied in its æsthetic form and in that special sphere of it which we call the Sublime.

The distinction between the Sublime and the Beautiful is out of fashion and no doubt it has been overdrawn—for instance in the period when Burke

accounted for the difference between them by saying that the one expanded, while the other contracted the eyeball. The word itself has become slightly pompous and pedantic, perhaps from its proverbial association with the ridiculous; even in its best sense it has a touch of the Utopian; a certain statesman who shall be nameless, referred to the "sublime precepts" of the Sermon on the Mount when proposing *not* to follow them; nevertheless it does express a certain awe before the greatness of the Unknown, which it is well worth our while to analyse.

No doubt there is a sense in which our experience of the Beautiful is mysterious; something in it eludes us; we feel a restlessness in its presence. An atmosphere of strangeness accompanies the presence of perfection in any form. But the element of mystery is not here primary; the haunting beauty of a lyric or of a face is due rather to the fact that perfection of form, when contrasted with our everyday life, carries a sense of aloofness and fragility; it moves "thoughts too deep for tears." The Beautiful is strange, not in itself, but because it is so rare a visitant.

The Sublime, on the other hand, has mystery as part of its essence; it at once awakens "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls." It has been usual to put down "greatness" as the first mark of the Sublime—not necessarily greatness of size. No one supposes that a firm, which turns out a hundred cars a day, is more sublime than one which turns out fifty. Yet greatness of size can become impressive if it is associated with a certain vagueness.

Numbers only begin to produce such an impression when they get beyond our ability to count. Consider, for example, " Ten thousand times ten thousand " as expressing the multitude of the Heavenly Host; if we do the sum and bring it out as 100,000,000 the impression is weakened. Mere size, if big enough to be vague, can give a sense of grandeur; Armageddon is more sublime than a street fight.

If we may return to a former example we shall see this point emerge again. On page 3 we said that as no one wished to know all the details of past history, moment by moment, they did not constitute a mystery proper; here we may add that our very ignorance of them may be so handled as to awaken a sense of grandeur; Carlyle is able to make us feel like that about all these million human lives once so warm-blooded and confident, now gone for ever beyond our ken.

All mystery must have this element of vagueness; in a good ghost story we are affected much more by the phrase " a presence in the room " than by too detailed a description. The same of course is still more true of the Sublime; this element is prominent in Old Testament poetry as in Ezekiel's famous description, " Upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness of the appearance of a Man above upon it "; it is of the essence of such Miltonic lines as " ruining along the illimitable inane."

Of course size and uncertainty of outline are not enough by themselves, or else a fog at sea would be the most sublime of sights. There must be a shudder of apprehension which yet makes part of our enjoyment.

It is easy to trace this fear of the unknown to some survival of savage instincts; our ancestors lived in an atmosphere of perpetual insecurity; the darkness of the forest was full of prowling beasts; the world was governed by powers who were always ready to avenge themselves on Man for offences unwittingly committed. It is easy to quote Lucretius' "Primus in orbe deos fecit timor"; but this has little bearing on our present æsthetic experiences. The fact that I was afraid of the world once for very good reasons does not explain the fact that I now enjoy being afraid for no particular reason.

The delicious frisson which we feel on hearing a ghost story round a cosy fireside, is easy to explain; the real security throws into relief the make-believe peril; one stimulates the other, as when we recall dangers of the past in times of ease. The enjoyment soon ceases if we have to go out alone in the dark. But in our experience of the Sublime the inter-penetration of the fear and joy is far more subtle; the fear is transmuted by the appreciation into awe and the appreciation tinged with fear becomes wonder or astonishment. Mysteries of this kind depend on contrast; such contrast is always there in our double state of mind; sometimes it is in the object also. It half reveals and half conceals; it suggests more than it expresses; it hovers between the known and the unknown; or else it attracts by something familiar which, as we approach, turns out to be strange; or else it seems to repel us by a grandeur and austerity which yet we long for through every fibre of our being. In the strict sense of the word, it fascinates.

This is the reason why the placing of the known beside the unknown so often produces the effect of sublimity. Some incident is lifted out of its setting and invested with the immensity of the universe. When in the Fourth Gospel, after the departure of Judas from the Last Supper, the Evangelist adds, "And it was night," he suggests by that touch the shadow of a great conflict at hand; the horizon widens and darkens with menace; all round that homely scene in the upper chamber we seem to hear the hosts of evil gathering for their last assault.[1]

Sometimes the effect is secured by a reverse process; De Quincey, in his well-known essay, points out that the knocking at the door in Macbeth seems sublime, because from a supernatural world of phantoms we are suddenly brought back to earth again.

If we analyse still further this mixture of fear and enjoyment, we see at once that the fear is not mere personal alarm (there is nothing sublime about that); nor does the unknown alarm us simply because we don't know from what quarter it may come; that would merely produce agitation. The Unknown is feared as unknown, but also as grand and impressive; we may be frightened of Poltergeists; we do not (in this sense of the word) *fear* them. What impresses us is the greatness of the universe—"cosmic vast-

[1] Whether this is conscious artistry on the part of the Evangelist I always feel doubtful; that the author of the Gospel was an artist does not mean that he was capable of producing this kind of effect, which I think has no parallels in the work. The sentence may be a mere indication of time, loosely connected by καὶ like so many of his sentences.

ness" as it is sometimes called.[1] This is also why the fear is enjoyed; though the world may baffle us, we rejoice that it is a great and wonderful world. Fear of what is higher and nobler than ourselves exalts us, just as fear of what is lower than ourselves degrades us. We are commanded to fear God, not the devil.

When we have reached this stage, it is easy to see how fear is more and more counter-balanced by an increase on the side of enjoyment. In the Sublime, the element of awe is predominant; we can pass from that to acquiescence, wonder and worship, and with that we have reached Religion.

Acquiescence is opposite to doubt and rebellion; we are no longer baffled or disappointed at the unknown; we submit to it; we "accept Reality."[2] We see this in some kinds of Stoicism; Marcus Aurelius cries to Nature, "Nothing that comes at the right time for thee comes too early or too late for me"; we see it again in Spinoza, for whom the secret of peace lies in accepting things as they are. Religion when it lays stress on the "immutable decrees" of God encourages the same kind of joyous submission.

Wonder is more active; it runs about exploring the world; it is the mood so well described in Traherne's account of his own childhood. It is different from Stoicism, because it enjoys; there is

[1] Astronomy used to be regarded as specially evocative of a cosmic sense, but it looks as if the spaces and measurements of modern astronomy fill the mind with a sense of emptiness; they oppress rather than expand. If this is so, it suggests that an object may be *too* vast to be sublime.

[2] Like Margaret Fuller, the American Transcendentalist; "Gad, she'd better," was Carlyle's comment.

no stern resignation, no indifference, no contempt of pleasure, no self-reliance, but a naturalness, an innocent and sparkling joy like that of children in their Father's house. Traherne quotes the story of the Greek philosopher who walked through a market saying, " Ye gods, how many things there are I can do without," but he quotes it to show how unchristian is the sentiment. In the final stage of *Worship*, the two elements of repulsion and attraction—what we might call the positive and negative poles—are both at their most intense and yet are fused. Nowhere else is the sense of abasement and nothingness so strong. St. Paul is struck to the earth and blinded by the vision of the Christ ; Isaiah, as the heavenly adoration sounds in his ears, cries, " Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips." Yet there is also the moment of reconciliation —the deeper because of the contrast, the more significant because it seems without meaning. We trust because we know we are inexcusable ; we are accepted because we have nothing to offer. Death is itself transfigured into Resurrection.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION AND MYSTERY

IT is characteristic of Religion to delight in mysteries; it never seems to have enough of them. Sir Thomas Browne expresses this instinct when he says, "Methinks there be not impossibilities enough in religion for an active faith; I love to lose myself in a Mystery, to pursue my reason to an O Altitudo . . . this I think is no vulgar part of faith to believe a thing not only above, but contrary to Reason and against the Argument of our proper sense"[1]; this tendency seems partly due to a belief that the more we multiply the difficulties, the more exercise there is for an "Active faith," and partly it comes from a desire to preserve the greatness of God by assuring ourselves that He dwells in "light inaccessible"; "Un Dieu défini," it has been said, "c'est un Dieu fini."

Such an attitude if pressed too far results in complete Obscuranticism; it would have to hold that the more unintelligible anything is, the more likely it is to be divine; that faith needs total darkness for its sphere of action; that, whatever

[1] "Religio Medici," pp. 10, 12 (Everyman Edition).

is fantastic enough, must be true and that the worship of Mumbo-Jumbo is the ideal cult.

Let us try to clear our thoughts on the subject by asking, Could we conceive a Religion that should have no mysteries in it ? It is very difficult to frame the idea of any kind of Theism without it, for any Divine perfection (even if it is only perfection of intelligence) is always mysterious. A semi-pantheistic philosophy which believed in a Spirit, whose reality was only expressed in human history, would still have to leave open the mystery of the future.

Life without mystery would be intolerable, not merely because the human brain needs more and ever more problems to solve—this would be to identify mystery with the not yet known, and we have seen how inadequate such a definition is—but because the human spirit longs for a satisfaction that life can never fully supply. The world as we know it does not commend itself to our judgment as complete or self-explanatory ; a belief in mystery is necessary to re-assure us that beyond it there lies a reality greater than we dream. We are often told that it is the function of Beauty to make this life æsthetically complete, that the poet can so elevate some sordid event into the atmosphere of serene tragedy that we ask for nothing further ; the heroism that arouses our admiration or the suffering that moves our tears are fixed by art in a grandeur that justifies life. A moralist might not feel the same acquiescence in the sin and injustices of the world because they provide poses for the sculptor. But leaving that on one side, the witness of imagination itself is on the side of mystery.

Why is the poet praised for creating worlds out of his own fancy? Why do we admire the richness of his imagery? Why do we follow him with joy as he carries us along, opening up new horizons and yet making us feel not that he is nearer his end, but that his song is just beginning? Why do we love to read the Arabian Nights or Kubla Khan? What is the appeal of:

"Magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery-lands forlorn"?

If Reality cannot satisfy all this restlessness of the imagination, then we must conclude that Art in some of its finest forms is a rebellion against the poverty of the real; but if our æsthetic ideals are in any sense rooted in nature and true of the world, then Art does witness to a beyond.[1]

It is an ultimate paradox about mystery that so far from it being true that it checks or hinders the demands of our reason, in a sense reason itself demands it. It is because the natural facts fail to satisfy that we crave for the supernatural; miracles give us glimpses of a wider world more in harmony with Reason than that of ordinary experience. The mystery of immortality gives a meaning to instincts which apart from it would be unreasonable. The mystery of Heaven gives some answer to the intolerable pressure of suffering or bereavement. Our world without mystery would be more mysterious still.

To accept the dull matter-of-fact view that

[1] It is true, of course, that the wildest flights of fancy start from the ground of fact; that the palace of Art is built out of materials gathered from experience, though rearranged. But this is the point—why *re*-arranged?

things will always go on pretty much as they do now—that is to be content with narrow generalisations from imperfect experience; that, and not theories about the structure of the atom, is true Materialism, and against it Art and Religion protest together; they unite to defend that freshness of expectation, that purity of heart that one calls Imagination and the other Faith.

But there is nothing unreasonable about the creations of the poet or the meditations of the prophet. Unless we are prepared to say that life, as we know it, offers no problems and leaves no hunger of soul unsatisfied, it cannot be unreasonable to look to some larger harmony—and in all his progress this is what Man does; he turns his back on what he sees and trusts something he does not see. When he comes up against the Unknown, Man at his best does not retire, defeated and resentful; he joyously and gallantly accepts the mystery, "believing where he cannot understand."

NOTES ON PART I

(i) *On some psychological explanations of our enjoyment of the Mysterious*

IN this note I wish to examine (very shortly) three theories, which seek to analyse our propensity for mystery and to suggest a prejudice against it by exhibiting its disreputable ancestry.

(*a*) Freud, as is well known, puts it down to a child-complex ; when we are young and things grow too difficult for us, we run to our mothers ; so, when faced with a situation that overstrains our understanding or overtasks our wills, we take refuge in trust ; we throw our burden on another ; we carry our perplexities to the All-Wise ; we cast our failures on the All-Holy.

There is of course truth in this. It is significant that Religion loves to use the language of childhood (" A new birth," " Children of God," " Holding His hand," etc.) ; but, if this is regarded as damaging to religion, we have only to look at Knowledge and Art, where similar phrases are in use. The poet values the childlike heart, that is not staled by custom, and it was a great thinker who said that we were like children picking up pebbles on the shore.

If it is meant that Religion sometimes makes people soft and flabby, very well—it is also true of any great human activity not strenuously or thoroughly practised. If it is meant that the typical Christian saints (St. Francis, for instance) are not "virile," one can only say that, as psychology, it is a remarkably poor effort, while, as a piece of Moral Philosophy, it implies Nietzche's view that self-assertion is an end in itself.

(*b*) Then there is what may be called the theory of Compensation; when we are faced with a problem we cannot solve, our pride is baffled and so we cry up the beauties of humility; we make a virtue of necessity; we conceal the inward smart, caused by our failure and ignorance, by saying, "It was presumptuous to seek for truth in this matter." Thus we have it both ways; where we succeed, we stand erect and say, "How great a thing is Man"; where we fail, we fall on our knees and say, "Man's true dignity is to be like a little child." William James expresses this, somewhat satirically, when after coming up against a psychological problem he cannot solve, he proceeds,[1] "Many would find relief at this point in celebrating the Mystery of the Unknowable and the 'awe' which we should feel at having such a principle to take final charge of our perplexities. It may be a constitutional infirmity, but I can take no comfort in such devices for making a luxury of intellectual defeat; they are but spiritual chloroform."

No doubt it is possible to enjoy self-humiliation, and there are certainly cases where humility is

[1] "Psychological Principles," Vol. I, p. 179.

merely a name for a wholly selfish timidity or laziness. But it is really over-subtle to suggest that all cases, where we approve of humility, are really only the conferring of a sympathetic Order of Merit to cover our want of success. The facts are much more simple and much more interesting. Man has an insistent impulse to lose himself in something greater; mere negative self-hatred is neither normal nor moral. True humility is joyous surrender to the highest. This is one real source of the attractiveness of mystery; it assures us of something which, because it is infinitely greater than ourselves, offers inexhaustible opportunities of surrender.

" For when we find the praise of Thee
A task beyond our powers
We say, ' A wondrous God is He
And He is wholly ours.' "

Faber's hymn brings out the point that the joy of mystery is not merely that there are always more problems before us, to try our intellectual teeth upon; this is to ignore the strangeness, the " otherness," the sanctity of the Unknown. It is different in quality from the known—not a mere extension of it—in the same way as the Infinite is different from the finite.

(*c*) Lastly there is the theory of Laziness. Bacon complains that the philosophers of his day charged upon the greatness and subtlety of Nature what was in reality due to their own idleness, faint-heartedness and incompetence of method.

There is truth in this; nothing is easier than to evade an issue, which we are too lazy to face, by saying, " It is all so hard "; much scepticism is due

to such indecision of character; we saw how ready Hamlet was to use intellectual perplexities as an excuse for avoiding practical decisions. But the effect of Mystery, rightly understood, is as we have seen, to stimulate as well as to baffle. A slothful mind may plead mystery, because it dares not face fresh points of view. That is superstition, but I do not suppose it would be absent under a "Rationalist" regime; conservative-minded people will always hate new explanations of old facts and if they cannot take refuge in mysteries, which must not be probed, they will appeal to social conventions, which must not be disturbed. People who do not want to think, will always live in a little universe, whether they call themselves Christians or atheists; people with a sense of reverence and a love for truth will always be glad that man's "reach should exceed man's grasp," whether they celebrate the mysteries of faith or the mysteries of doubt.

(ii) *On the Vague and the Inexpressible*

Vagueness in religion is an accusation which we sling, one at the other, a good deal. Newman has a well-known passage about the Church of England.[1] "In the present day, mistiness is the mother of wisdom. A man who can set down half a dozen general propositions, which escape from destroying one another only by being diluted into truisms, who can hold the balance between opposites so skilfully as to do without fulcrum or beam, who never enunciates a truth without guarding himself against

[1] "Apologia" (Everyman Edition), p. 109—the passage, it will be remembered, was written while he was still an Anglican.

being supposed to exclude the contradictory, who holds that Scripture is the only authority, yet that the Church is to be deferred to, that faith only justifies, yet that it does not justify without works, that grace does not depend on the Sacraments yet is not given without them, that bishops are a divine ordinance yet those, who have them not, are in the same religious condition, as those who have; this is your safe man, this is what the Church is said to want, not party men but sensible, temperate, sober, well-judging persons to guide us through the channel of no-meaning, between the Scylla and Charybdis of Aye and No."

Many persons regard the average Englishmen as floundering in a mass of sentimentality and hymn tunes, knowing neither what he believes nor why he believes it; hence the demand for more "definite" teaching.

On the other hand, we often hear counter-charges against what is called the "Latin mind"; it is accused of being too precise, of defining too exactly; it is said to be legal and institutional, pedantic about its ceremonial, too fond of clear-cut distinctions, classical in its love of line and form as opposed to the romantic temperament of the North with its taste for mist and twilight. A large mind (it is said) cannot help being vague; only those who want short cuts to truth clamour for precision.

Two quotations from Father Knox illustrate satire directed against the vague in religion; the first is the Collect for Modernists:

"O God, forasmuch as without Thee
We are not enabled to doubt Thee

O grant us Thy Grace
To tell the whole race
We know nothing whatever about Thee."

The other is a couplet from " The Absolute and A-bit-of-Hell " :

" When suave politeness tempered bigot zeal
Converting ' I believe ' to ' One *does* feel.' "

On the other side, for satire directed against the over-precise, I suppose it would be hard to beat the discussion in heaven on the validity of the baptism of the penguins in Anatole France's " Ile des Pengouins."

The issue is clearly an important one, but we have mentioned it chiefly in order to deny that it has any close connection with the subject of the mysterious. One can see that if one considers that it is just the people who are trying to minimise the supernatural element in Religion, who are accused of being " vague."

The vagueness, which is part of mystery, is not uncertainty of outline, but a significance pointing beyond itself. The over-plus or echo of a musical sound can give a haunting sense of distance (just as an evocative phrase can echo through the chambers of the mind), but that does not prevent the sound or the phrase being definite enough; vagueness in a bad sense only occurs when they are confused.

So vagueness in the devotional life is bad, if it means a weak grasp on the right methods of prayer, but it is good, if behind and beyond the methods we leave a window open to the mysterious.

The inexpressible is not necessarily the same as

the mysterious; we often use it of what "cannot be put into words," though it can perhaps be expressed by music or action. But of course, in a sense, all feeling defies complete expression. This applies not only to the mystical yearnings of the soul, but also to toothache or indigestion. Real mystery is recognised by some quality of greatness or fascination which is positive; the negative quality of being unutterable is quite secondary.

(iii) *On the Humorous*

An interesting and important book still waits to be written on Humour in its relation to Morals and Religion; if (as Sir Walter Raleigh said) Humour is as necessary to us as Beauty was to the Greeks, we ought to have some clear and fresh guidance on such questions as, When is a joke irreverent? or, Are charity and wit compatible?

In this note we are only concerned with the humorous as offering an interesting contrast to the mysterious. The moment anything becomes humorous, it becomes little, measurable, familiar and ceases to be awe-inspiring (as for instance a funny ghost); in this sense laughter and worship would seem to be at opposite poles. But we should fall into the same error as Bergson in his "Le rire" if we thought that laughter is always cruel[1]; it is often full of pity and tenderness for the small, the fragile, the incongruous; Religion is especially the sphere of humour, because there the contrasts are so enormous between the immensity of its teaching and the pettiness of its

[1] Hobbes takes a similar view when he treats laughter as a sudden glorying at the downfall of others.

realisation of them. Everything seems little against the eternal background. Humour can help to bring out the absurdity of human pretensions; if it is combined with a sense of the greatness of the background, it may well be called an important part of the saintly character.[1]

[1] The sense of humour is not only useful for "taking people down a peg"; a priest might well comfort an over-scrupulous penitent by making him laugh at his anxieties.

PART TWO

MYSTERY IN THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH

CHAPTER V

MYSTERY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

IF we were to divide the sphere of Mystery into three parts—Mysteries of *Thought* (What is true?), Mysteries that are *Moral* (Why do things happen as they do?), and Mysteries of *Feeling*, where there is no question asked but only an attitude of imaginative wonder; we might say that Hebrew thought is not very much concerned with mysteries of thought; the Hebrew mind was practical not speculative; the Jews did not argue much about God's existence, or the reality of Religion; the "fool who said in his heart there is no God" is not St. Anselm's dialectician but a practical unbeliever, who acts as though God did not exist. Idolatry, not unbelief is the enemy of the prophets.

Mystery of feeling (Otto's sense of the Numinous) is implicit in the "awe-ful" Otherness of Jahweh and explicit in the style of Job or the prophets. But the main mystery of the Old Testament is a moral one—Why do the ungodly prosper? Why do God's people have to suffer oppression and persecution?[1]

[1] The word "Mystery" appears not to occur in our translation of the Old Testament; it comes in the Apocrypha (Wisdom ii, 22) where the ungodly knew "not the mysteries of God," i.e. the hope of immortality, clear enough to the righteous. The Greek word μυστήριον means a secret hidden from some and

This is especially true of the Psalms; no false reverence prevents the authors from remonstrating with God; they speak frankly, sometimes even crudely. But, on the whole, the demand is for deliverance rather than explanation; the pious mind did often cry out "Why?" but it had generally reached a stage when the conventional explanations seemed worthless enough; the moral of Job is that all human attempts to justify the ways of God are vain.

There are Psalms, where there is a confession that Israel has deserved to suffer because of her unfaithfulness, but there are others (perhaps of the Maccabean period) where no guilt is admitted. "Though all this be come upon us, yet do we not forget Thee nor behave ourselves frowardly in Thy covenant; our heart is not turned back neither our steps gone out of the way" (Ps. xliv, 18, 19). The purpose of God is regarded as an inscrutable secret.

The Psalmist finds comfort not in theories but in facts and he generally appeals either to *past* history or *future* hope or (more rarely) to *present* experience. All three illustrate the element of Mystery.

In the past he looks back to the wonders which God had wrought for His people; Hebrew thought had no idea of a system of causation or an order of

known to others (as in Tobit xii, 7, the "secret of the King"), but it has little reference to the mysterious. "Wonderful" sometimes comes nearer to it (cf. Ps. cxxxvii, 13, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made"). The word "secret" sometimes brings out the Mystery of the Divine Being (Ps. lxxxi, 7, "I heard Thee in the secret place of thunder," or Ps. xviii, 11, "He made darkness His secret place"); in Ps. xlix, 4 we might almost take "I will shew my dark speech upon the harp" as meaning "I will speak of the mystery (of human destiny)."

Nature; everything that happened was the direct action of God. Browning's Luria expresses this when he says:

"My own East!
How nearer God we were! He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, His soul o'er ours!
We feel Him, nor by painful reason know.
The everlasting minute of creation
Is felt there; *Now* it is, as it was Then;
All changes at His instantaneous will,
Not by the operation of a law,
Whose maker is elsewhere at other work!
His soul is still engaged upon His world."

The Psalmist loves to dwell on God's interventions to help His own, the plagues of Egypt, the giving of the Law from Sinai, above all the crossing of the Red Sea:

"The waters saw Thee, O God;
The waters saw Thee and were afraid."

All that happens is due to God's creative power; the more mysterious and inexplicable, the more it is divine.

Does the Psalmist look forward also to future miracles? Sometimes, as when the defeat of Sennacherib colours apocalyptic visions of the whole world, supernaturally crushed before Israel; but, as opposed to such military dreams, there are also quiet pastoral pictures of normal peace and prosperity, "That our garners may be full and plenteous in all manner of store, that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets" (Ps. cxliv, 13).

Similarly the coming of God's covenanted blessings sometimes seems to depend on God's impenetrable counsel (Joel's "Who knoweth if God will return and repent?"), at other times, it seems conditional on Israel's response, as in Psalm lxxxi, 13, "Oh, that My people would hearken unto Me; that Israel would walk in My ways; I should soon subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries."

The appeal to the present consolations of God's presence only appears in Psalms of the highest spiritual level and it is generally marked by a sense of mystery (as in the great Psalm of Asaph, lxxiii, 21, 22: "So foolish was I and ignorant even as it were a beast before Thee; nevertheless I am always by Thee, for Thou hast holden me by my right hand") where God's condescension in communing with the Psalmist is an object of wonder, or as in Psalm xxxix, where the thought of God's Omnipresence first terrifies the Psalmist ("Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me. . . . Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?") and then becomes a theme for confidence and thanksgiving ("How dear are Thy counsels unto me, O God; Oh, how great is the sum of them!") In the prophets we see the same moral problem—though it is less of a problem; the prophetic mind sees far enough to feel confidence in God's mercy, while many of the Psalmists represent the more average kind of religious attitude, which feels the trials of the present more acutely.

The prophets also, by their style and imagery, express the mystery of God's Being and His ways; they feel a sense of awe before His Otherness, as in

the sixth chapter of Isaiah where the prophet cries out " Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips."[1] There is no need to multiply instances of the idea of the Numinous in the Old Testament ; to do so would be to examine the whole nature of Hebrew religion and anyone who has read Professor Otto's " Idea of the Holy " can verify it for himself, but it is worth adding a few words about the Book of Job for here the two kinds of mystery come together ; the numinous quality of God, as we find it in the prophets, is used to solve, or rather to relieve the problem of Evil, as we find it in the Psalms. The " mysteriousness " of God helps us to face the mystery of Suffering. The fine study of Job in Professor Otto's book should be read and read again;[2] as he points out, so far from seeing God and the universe as exhibiting purpose or plan, the author, in the concluding chapters, takes comfort from the impressive purposelessness of things ; it is all too big for neat and tidy explanations. So, from a slightly different point of view, Mr. Chesterton, writing in defence of Nonsense, has suggested that in some passages there is almost an appreciation of absurdity as present in the world, e.g. " To cause it to rain on a land, where no man is, on the wilderness wherein there is no man."

[1] Otto and his school regard the uncleanness not as a sense of sin, but as a feeling of abasement before the Numinous ; I do not feel quite convinced ; the fact that the uncleanness is felt in the lips suggests that, on hearing the heavenly praises, Isaiah feels the contrast with the unworthy earthly services in the Temple. Anyhow (as Otto is always pointing out) the idea of abasement before the Numinous gets very easily attached to moral offences ; it is just that which distinguishes " sin " from wrong-doing.

[2] Pp. 80–84.

In any case, before the wonder and strangeness of the universe, man's duty is silence, not argument. Job's friends are rebuked not because their explanations of suffering are bad, but because they offer any explanations at all; the answer to Job's questions is that there is no answer.

The psychology of this is much less paradoxical than it sounds; there is no better way of meeting pain and stifling complaint than by diverting the mind to something far greater than one self; if we plunge into the depths of Nature's works, we have left moral and personal worries behind; we watch and wonder.[1]

[1] Two points may be added in a footnote. (*a*) Of course, if we remember the prologue to Job, we know the real explanation; Satan is testing Job to prove his disinterestedness, but surely this somewhat primitive setting of the original story has been forgotten by the man who wrote chapters 38–42, where God gives no hint of such a solution; (*b*) It is worth noting that most of the examples chosen (the stars, the ostrich, the war-horse, etc.) are meant to show the strangeness of what is familiar; it is the ordinary world seen upside down. The more fantastic shapes of Behemoth and Leviathan (fine as they are) are generally thought to be later and more artificial additions.

CHAPTER VI

MYSTERY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

IT is necessary to say a few words here about the word μυστήριον; its use is not free from difficulties, but it seems probable that it should not be taken as having much to do with "mysteriousness" in our sense of the word. In the pagan mysteries, it meant a secret revealed to the initiated, who were only allowed to speak about it under their breaths (the verb μύειν seems to refer to almost inarticulate sounds); in the New Testament the emphasis is strongly on its being *now* revealed—only to the faithful no doubt, but the secret is meant for all men—not merely for the votaries of a particular deity. Lightfoot (on Col. i, 26) says, "Of the nature of the truth itself the word says nothing; it may be transcendental, incomprehensible, mystical, mysterious in the modern sense of the term, but this idea is quite accidental and must be gathered from the special circumstances of the case."

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the "mystery of the calling of the Gentiles is referred to, as fully made known to St. Paul; the New Commentary (on Ephes. i, 9) says: "In contrast with the modern use of the word as something unintelligible, the chief stress in the New Testament is not on the past

concealment of God's purpose, but on its present revelation" (p. 541). So probably the "great mystery" of Ephesians v, 32 (the relation of Christ to His Church) does not mean "something very hard to understand," but "an important part of revealed truth." In Revelation, the words mean a key to a puzzle (e.g. i, 20: "the mystery of the seven stars"). The hardest phrase to interpret is, undoubtedly, "the mystery of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians ii, 7; this is sometimes taken as a secret of evil that shall be revealed at the Last times; but St. Paul seems to assume that the Thessalonian Church already knew something about it, for he says; "Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I *told* you these things; ye *know* that which restraineth; the mystery doth *already* work."

In the only case where Our Lord is reported to have used the word, the sense is almost the opposite to ours; He says to the Twelve (Mark iv, 11): "Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but unto them, that are without, all things are done in parables," which we could almost paraphrase, "I speak to outsiders symbolically and mysteriously, but I tell you the secret plainly."[1]

It is clear, therefore, that we cannot assess the occurrence of the idea of Mystery in the New Testament by counting up the number of times μυστήριον is used; nor do I propose to confine the word to the sense of the "Numinous," as Otto defines it. One of his chief difficulties is the way in which he narrows it to a sense of shuddering

[1] I suppose the change to our modern sense of the word is due to the phrase τα μυστήρια becoming technical for The Sacraments.

abasement which he describes as the right attitude of Man to God; he is then very hard put to it to find examples of such an attitude in Our Lord Himself.

In any case, mystery in the wider sense of the Unknown as kindling joy, wonder and reverence can be found throughout the New Testament; it lies at the heart of the Sacramental principle behind the Incarnation, whereby we see a deep, inner significance in outward things. Our Lord, for instance, saw the mystery of childhood when something in their eyes reminded Him of the angels round His Father's Throne.

We shall say a few words about the element of Mystery as contained in the New Testament ideas of Faith, Miracles and the Kingdom.

(1) *Faith.*

Perhaps, of all the New Testament writings, the Epistle to the Hebrews is most full of the sense of mystery; the writer keeps ever before him the awful Majesty of God; he thinks of Him as a piercing sword and a consuming fire; he considers visible things Plato-wise as symbols and shadows of higher realities; so all the Old Dispensation is a type of the New; the earthly tabernacle stands for the eternal temple on high; the terrors and thunders of Sinai foretold (by contrast) the solemn sanctities of the City of God. It is in this setting that we get the famous definition of Faith as "the proving of things not seen." In the Pauline psychology, Hope plays the same part in appealing to an invisible future: "Who hopeth for that which he

seeth ? " (Rom. viii, 24) ; faith for St. Paul is rather the complete surrender of the whole personality, here and now, in response to God's mercy revealed through Christ.

All faith, in its widest sense, is directed towards what is not seen or not known ; the reformer's faith in the future, the faith of a scientist that Reality will always prove rational, the faith of the moralist that goodness will prevail, the faith of one friend in another, but we must distinguish what is not *yet* seen or known from what is in itself invisible or unknowable. The future is in a vague sense mysterious, and to believe in it is a leap in the dark, but mystery proper—and especially religious mystery—is rather beyond our knowledge than just not known.

When St. Paul said (2 Cor. iv, 18) : " We look . . . at the things which are not seen, for the things that are not seen, are eternal," in one sense he means things *not yet* seen—the coming of the Kingdom, which he hopes to see with his bodily eyes, but, after all, the Parousia is not for him simply an event in the future ; it is the end of History and the universal reign of God when all evil shall have been put under Christ's feet and this corruptible shall have put on incorruption. Such a transformation is in the fullest sense of the word mysterious and supernatural. Faith in any progress or expansion of this natural order is not πίστις in the New Testament sense of the word. Whether it is a knowledge of the present or a hope for the future, both are made mysterious because of that surrender to another order (" the powers of the age to come "

which yet the Epistle to the Hebrews says we "taste" already). The object of faith for the Christian must always fade off into the unknowable, from which it comes. We shall pass on to see what is involved in this, by considering faith in a miraculous order of things.

(2) *Miracles.*

We have all lived through a time of violent reaction against old views of the supernatural—the tendency to find "God in the gaps" as Aubrey Moore christened it. We ridicule the idea that what is unaccountable must be held on that account divine—or diabolic; we prefer to speak of miracles as "examples of a higher law," which only seem extraordinary to us, because of our ignorance; we are fond of quoting St. Augustine's saying that miracles are not against Nature but only against Nature as far as we know it; we approve of Bishop Butler's suggestion that perhaps from the point of view of the angels, what seems to us miraculous may appear perfectly normal and natural.

If it is suggested that all this tends to make miracles less miraculous, the modern mind is in arms at once. "What a heresy (it exclaims) to suppose that a thing becomes less wonderful, because we understand it! Is Music less of a mystery, because we know the laws of sound? Are we to swallow the poet, Campbell's fallacy, and suppose that Science spoils the beauty of the rainbow by analysing its component parts? The world of nature is not less wonderful because we can foresee and explain its behaviour.

" Why, who makes much of miracle ?
As for me, I know of nothing but miracle."

So speaks Walt Whitman, and every true poet has felt the same. So, the supernatural world is not less a world of order because the glimpses of it seem wonderful nor the natural world less wonderful because it is a world of order.

" If He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His Voice."

This Victorian theory is indeed being attacked, not because of any revived belief in miracles, but by an increasing scepticism about the uniformity of the natural order ; it is being widely felt that the whole theory was really based on an unjustified use of the metaphorical idea of " law " ; the word has been so riddled with criticism that hardly anyone would use it except in inverted commas ; people are tired of thinking of Nature as a well-policed commonwealth where the Assize Judge, whenever he pays his visit, is sure of a pair of white gloves ; Professor Broad has wittily said : " I do not confuse the Author of Nature with the Editor of ' Nature '."

This reaction, like the Victorian outlook which still dominates the feeling of the ordinary man, is anxious not to contrast laws of nature with lawless incursions of the supernatural, but whereas the Victorians did it because they wanted to see law everywhere, their critics do it because they are not sure of law anywhere.

The actual result is not very different in the two cases ; the supernatural is still thought of as Nature at a higher level ; they are ultimately the same in

kind, whether or not we find their similarity in obedience to law. There is nothing we need more to clarify our religious thinking than a sharper line between the natural and the supernatural orders.[1]

We are not, fortunately, concerned here with any such attempt at reconstruction; the only point which is important for us is the element of mystery in the miraculous.

Now the whole argument of this book, so far, has been that mystery implies the presence of something unknown, accepted and enjoyed as unknown; much modern criticism of the supernatural is based on the rather high-brow dogma that is vulgar to admire a thing because it is unknown. There is no need to state again our reasons for treating this as a fallacy; we have shown how admirable a part the Unknown *qua* Unknown plays in many departments of human experience, but it is worth noticing here how easy it is to be half-consciously influenced by such a fallacy when dealing with the miraculous.

Thus it is perfectly true to say that "natural" happenings (the sunset or the heavens at night) convey a sense of mystery, but this is precisely because they are *not* fully known. They are felt to have a background that eludes us; they pass away into a world we cannot enter. It is not here a question whether they are accidental or necessary; a

[1] If we take such an admirable book as Dr. Cairns' "A Faith that Rebels," we find that he is in such reaction from other-worldliness that he hardly mentions the life beyond the grave. No one wishes to advocate a passive acquiescence in the injustices of the natural order on the ground that they will be redressed in the world to come, but there is surely very little in Our Lord's language to suggest that the natural order could ever become an adequate home for man.

necessary event can be as mysterious as an " accidental one " if it becomes invested with the significance that Wordsworth felt so keenly :

" Of something far more deeply interfused."

From this point of view, Campbell, the much maligned, is perfectly right ; to explain things completely would be to empty them of all mystery and make them dull and trivial. For the imaginative mind and the believing heart (here poet and Christian stand side by side) there is nothing that can be completely explained ; every fact opens up endless vistas and so becomes wonderful.

Tennyson says :

" Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and Man is."

But he does not really wish to know, because omniscience (for a human mind) would kill the imagination.

It is always therefore a conscious reference to the unknown that makes anything mysterious and therefore we need not shrink from saying in the definition of a miracle that it is, in a high degree, inexplicable ; that is, that the reference to the unknown background is greater than in the case of the non-miraculous.

This is not to say that miracles are purely arbitrary or that the more nonsensical a thing is, the more we ought to welcome it as a true mystery ; it is very easy, for instance, in art, to overdo the supernatural ;

the wonder-stories in the Gospels are distinguished from Apocryphal legends precisely because they are restrained and because they are relevant to the occasion. As Matthew Arnold said: "The fact that I can turn my pen into a serpent and back again does not prove that what I am writing is true"; we do not want to plaster life over with the miraculous (as the mediæval mind was so prone to do); that does not make life more wonderful; it only makes it a patchwork; the dignity and purpose of the normal is destroyed by constant intrusions of the super-normal. Miracles are signs and must mean something.

Here perhaps we may get help by setting out more precisely what we have been trying to construct in rather a scattered way throughout this book—I mean the conditions under which a thing or a fact is regarded as mysterious; we shall then be better equipped for saying what relation the idea of the mysterious has to the kindred idea of the marvellous, the miraculous and the supernatural.

A thing is not mysterious, if it is completely unknown, for then it is out of all relation to life as we know it. The fairy-tale, or the fable, where animals talk, never give us a sense of mystery; they belong to a delicious world of make-believe, too far from ours, to be significant of anything.

A thing, on the other hand, is not a mystery when it is fully known; if we take a piece of experience, isolate it from its surroundings, and bring it down to manageable proportions so that we can know it through and through, it may be interesting, satisfying, charming; mysterious it can never be. We see

that in the case of human character; there are people whom we feel we know thoroughly; we can imagine their behaviour under any circumstances; they may be delightful and restful; we know we can rely upon them. But we know that human nature at its highest has in it something which is inexhaustibly surprising. Shakespeare has embodied this one quality of unexpectedness (almost apart from any other form of attractiveness) in Antony's Cleopatra.

A mysterious fact, then, must be something between the known and the unknown. But a half-understood truth is not a mystery, nor is the twilight of a vacant mind. The unknown to which the thing points must be felt to be great—even "to be feared," if the full æsthetic sense of the mysterious is to be satisfied.

Now, according to this definition, it appears that almost anything can become charged with this quality of significance. Any natural scene can suddenly become vaguely menacing; two well-known examples may suffice. Wordsworth's case is the more interesting because the scenery which before had seemed so friendly changes unexpectedly to something threatening:

> "A huge peak, black and huge,
> As if with volutary power instinct
> Upreared its head. . . . With trembling oars I turned,
> And through the silent water stole my way
> . . . After I had seen
> The spectacle, for many days my brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being."

("Prelude," Bk. I, 378.)

In Browning's "Childe Roland," the outward aspect of Nature points to some inner principle of evil:

"No; penury, inertness and grimace
In some strange sort were the land's portion. 'See
Or shut your eyes,' said Nature peevishly.
'It nothing skills; I cannot help my case
The Judgment's fire alone can cure this place,
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free'."

It is essential to such effects that the familiar should suddenly stand out against some vague and undefined background.

We must not, of course, over-emphasise the element of fear; it is the function of the imagination to free itself from dull routine and see romance and wonder everywhere, but religious mystery has always an element of holy awe; it rejoices to see God in the burning bush, but it removes the shoe from the foot.

In the case of religious mystery, the fact points to something divine; it might be said that for the true mystic, everything speaks of God; He can be seen in every grain of sand and every drop of water. But for ordinary people some things speak more readily of Him than others; we find Him more easily in church, at prayer, in His saints and His Sacraments and all these things become holy and mysterious.

The mysterious is not the only moment in our spiritual experience; we have times of clearness, when we seem to see the way before us, and times

of deadness when we seem to lose grasp altogether of the spiritual significance of life. But the mysterious moments are those in which a sense of the unknown background of life is dominant; as it predominates, the more the mystery deepens, till it is destroyed by its own excess, as in Negative Mysticism, where the object disappears against the background.

Now, a miracle is clearly one case, in which mystery is mediated. It must be performed in an atmosphere of prayer and worship and be greeted with fear and wonder; it mediates the Unknown because the mind passes from it directly to God without anything coming between. In a case of the normal, the mind, though it may wonder, dwells on known causes and conditions. Browning puts this with his usual sure touch in describing the miracle of music:

"Had I written the same, made verse—still effect proceeds from cause,
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled—
But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and lo, they are
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,

That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth
sound, but a star."[1]

It may help us to see this better if we contrast the "mystery" of evil with the "miracle" of individuality.

No one would speak of the miracle of evil; and that because (whatever our theological views) we should hardly treat evil as a direct work of God, in which He takes an author's pride; we should generally bring in a good many conditions and concomitant circumstances to account for the mass of sin and suffering we see around us; we might feel that, in the long run, the fact of evil drove us back to God; but we should hardly say that evil was especially significant of Him. We might, however, like Newman in the Apologia, take evil and putting it side by side with his certainty of God, arrive at the Mystery of the Fall.

So we speak of the mystery of life and death, because our minds naturally move from one fact to another (whatever theory of causation we may hold), and it needs an effort to leap to the unknown background of it all; but in the case of individuality, we speak of a miracle, because we do not see causes; the work of genius seems to spring unfathered from the brain; we call it creation—a becoming from nothing. We do not consciously contrast it with law; we may realise that it needs certain conditions, but we call it individual because we regard it as new, original, unique. Shakespeare may have been

[1] Abt Vogler—It need hardly be added that this beautiful antithesis between Music and the other arts, dramatically appropriate in the mouth of a musician, is highly questionable.

the product of certain conditions, but there are no rules for producing Shakespeares.[1]

All mystery therefore depends on its reference to something unknown; a miracle is not necessarily more inexplicable than a mystery. (Is the Resurrection harder to understand than the problem of suffering?), but it leads the mind more speedily to the unknown background. If we apply that to Our Lord's miracles, we see that they are called miracles, not mysteries because they are new creations; it is of some importance to remember this, because some people, who are anxious to describe Our Lord's "works" as simply examples of higher laws indignantly reject any other view as making Him a wonder-worker, pandering to men's love of the sensational.

Certainly Our Lord never wished to be that; certainly He rejected the Devil's prompting to throw Himself from the Temple, but it does not follow that He was simply making scientific experiments in mental power; to say that He was discovering new laws of human capacity is very much like saying that Shakespeare was discovering rules for writing good plays. The scientist in making an experiment tries to eliminate himself, but the works of Jesus were the supreme expression of His unique personality concentrated in that Godward attitude we

[1] Unless we are misled by the logical fallacy of the supposed law "If anyone were Shakespeare, he would do what Shakespeare did." In that case, of course, the supposed man would be Shakespeare over again; the only inference we are justified in drawing is, "If anyone were sufficiently like Shakespeare and the conditions sufficiently similar, he would behave in a similar way." This is enough indeed to base a science of psychology upon, but it is vital to remember its limitations as a "law."

call faith. It may be said that for such a person as Jesus miracles were " natural," but was the person of Jesus natural ? Is not the mystery of the σημεῖα very small compared with that of His Personality Who wrought them ?[1]

Our opinions will of course be coloured by what we believe as to that supernatural background to which mystery refers ; if that background is only the natural at a higher level, we shall think of Jesus as expressing the unknown potentialities of Man ; if we think of the supernatural as a different and divine order, we shall think of Him as expressing the unknown attributes of the Divine Nature also.

At the end of this somewhat arduous section, we may add some definitions, that have emerged ; a person or thing is " mysterious " when it points to the Unknown regarded as an object of fear, wonder or adoration ; a " miracle " is a special case, where the mind passes directly from the event to the unknown background ; the " supernatural " refers generally to such a background ; " the marvellous " is wider in its meaning and covers anything that surprises us ; a thing, completely understood, like an ingenious machine, can excite wonder.

(3) *The Kingdom.*

We are not proposing in this section to leap into the midst of the eschatological battle, but what we have been considering about the necessity of mystery in all human knowledge is of some importance in

[1] Doubtless He promised these powers to His followers : " Greater works than these shall ye do "—but the rest of the clause implies that it is really He Who will do them—" because it is I Who am going to the Father " to intercede for you.

its bearing on what are called the limitations of Our Lord's knowledge ; the phrase is not a happy one ; it suggests the false type of Kenotic theory—that God casts off more and more of His Deity till He is left with a residue called humanity. That is not a possible relationship between God and Man ; human nature has a dignity of its own ; just because it is not a " bit of God " but God's workmanship, it has a standpoint different from the Divine—not indeed independent nor supplying anything lacking in God, but appropriate to its nature. Thus a wise theology will speak of the Son of God as entering upon human experience rather than as reducing His own.

Now it is of the excellence of human nature to have to face mystery ; angels may worship God in the full blaze of day ; it is man's special function to serve in the twilight. The fact that there is so much he cannot understand, so far from being a defect, is just what makes and keeps him man ; it is the ground of virtues such as humility, courage, faith ; he would appear ridiculous if he strutted about pretending to be other than he is.[1]

If this is so, we shall expect to find the element of mystery accepted with joy in Our Lord's perfectly human mind. I do not think myself that it is possible to find in Him that sense of abasement

[1] Lovers of Browning will remember how when the angel takes the place of the boy, Theocrite, in praising God,

" God said : ' A praise is in mine ear ;
There is no doubt in it, no fear ;
So sing old worlds and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.
Clearer loves sound other ways ;
I miss my little human praise.' "

before the Numinous which Otto regards as the proper human attitude; His filial attitude to the Father is full of joy and confidence; nothing is more remarkable in His utterances than the absence of that deep wonder at God's goodness which is heard in all the saints; if we may say it reverently, He takes the perfection of God as "a matter of course"; it is the slowness and littleness of faith among men that move Him to astonishment. But with all this, there is a sense of Mystery; the presence of the Father, though it is continuously real to Him, is still grasped by faith; the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews interprets Jesus' humanity aright, when he says "Christ was heard for His godly fear" and that He is "the perfecter of our faith" in that "He endured the Cross for the joy, that was set before Him."[1]

If we turn to His message of the Kingdom, we think at once of that great passage, where He repudiates knowledge of the date of His Coming—and that, in a context where the highest dignity is claimed for the Son. "But of that Day and that Hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in Heaven, neither the Son" (St. Mark xiii, 32). It has rightly been held that a text which combines a high doctrine of Sonship with an assertion of His ignorance, has the mark of authenticity and should be treated as a regulative saying in all exegesis.

This profession of ignorance means that the Coming of the Kingdom depends entirely on the

[1] "The New Commentary" interprets (p. 623): "By faith He saw" and was assured of the "things hoped for"—'godly fear' (*ευλαβεια*) does not imply awe or reverence so much as a sensitive obedience.

good pleasure of the Father; it is transcendent and does not result from human effort. There is no suggestion in the Gospel that, as the world gets better, the Kingdom will gradually come; the parable of the seed in St. Mark is meant to show not that the Kingdom grows slowly, but that it comes "of itself"; all man can do is to "sleep and rise night and day" and wait; Our Lord even speaks as though the Kingdom may come, when the world is at its worst, as the Flood overtook the thoughtless contemporaries of Noah, and He says: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" No one can miss this element of mysteriousness; the Day comes as a thief in the night; all this is meant to heighten the sense that the Kingdom is in God's hand.

If Our Lord had said: "It is coming in your lifetime," or "It will not come for generations," it would equally have altered the mystery; the uncertainty of date is a parable (as it were) of the transcendence of the Kingdom. "You do not even know when it is coming; much less can you bring it about."[1]

[1] It seems often forgotten by those who defend the "gradual Coming" that it is as inconsistent with Our Lord's profession of ignorance as an imminent Parousia. If Our Lord was really ignorant, it is possible that He changed His mind and that He made different guesses at the date (Professor Turner very cautiously hints at this in the "New Commentary"); such a view is tenable; if He declared Himself ignorant, His infallibility cannot be at stake, but psychologically it is not like the sureness of Our Lord's style of preaching, and the passages do not sound like guessing. It is perhaps better (if more old-fashioned) to suppose that the Apostles were liable to a slight confusion (*a*) between the Fall of Jerusalem, the Coming of the Spirit, the Last Day, etc., and (*b*) between "imminence" in the sense of "hanging over you" and "immediate." Our word "near" can be used in both senses. "What may happen any minute" is very like "What is just going to happen."

CHAPTER VII

MYSTERY IN THE CHURCH

(1) *Grace.*

ST. PAUL expresses the fundamental mystery of Grace, when he says (Phil. ii, 12, 13): "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and work for His good pleasure."

When we speak of the mystery of God's working in human souls, we do not of course mean that it is arbitrary, giving a specially good time to His favourites; we recognise that His spiritual working is an order, in the sense that it has a purpose and a moral end.

But, as in the case of Miracles, we must not suppose that because a thing is not arbitrary, therefore it must conform to rules we can discover. It is a mistake, for instance, when studying the question of Causation, to suppose that the only alternative to rigid uniformity is complete anarchy; there are minds, which are so much in love with method, that wherever they cannot trace method, they feel themselves lost and suspect the worst. Thus Kant, in his Moral Philosophy, is always in a state of alarm lest, once we have stepped off the strait path of universal maxims, we may find ourselves astray on the "primrose path"; special cases at once suggest to him special pleading, and

that is the speciality of the Devil's advocate. To people who like systematic regulation and whose idea of administration is that of a Government department, where there is a circular to deal with every possible contingency, God's government of the world is bound to seem a complete mess—though they may be too polite to say so ; the unequal and capricious way, in which His gifts are distributed among people and nations, the sudden incursions of the accidental, the inexplicable, the mysterious, the irritating way in which people refuse to be labelled and catalogued as good or bad—all this is the despair of the business man.

But because a way of government does not conform to a set of rules it does not follow that it is capricious. A dictator may set himself above the laws of his country because he wants unbounded opportunities for gratifying his selfish desires, but he may also do it because he has (or thinks he has) plans for dealing with people and situations that cannot be brought under general principles ; as Plato says : " He would be a poor doctor, who was bound by his past prescriptions." In the same way, God's treatment of individuals may be exquisitely and delicately adapted to their needs. There is nothing capricious in that ; on the contrary, it would be capricious to adhere to a system, when He is dealing with anything as unique as a person.[1]

[1] I suppose the idea behind χάρις and " gratia " was originally that of something arbitrary (the stern Judge for reasons we cannot grasp, suddenly relaxes) ; the idea is Christianised by St. Paul under the form of our universal failure to deserve God's mercy.

Leaving on one side the question of God's ordering of the external affairs of the world (which has been dealt with in another book in this series), if we look at His training of individual souls, how far can we say that He works by means of laws we can discover? At what point does Mystery begin?

Certainly the spiritual life is not completely an adventure in the dark; we see dimly how psychological laws apply even to the highest forms of experience; we grasp, though very uncertainly, truths about the sub-conscious, the process of conversion and the sublimation of instincts. Suppose that analysis could proceed so far that all our life of prayer and devotion could be mapped out, and expressed in terms of law—would there be any mystery left? Would God be left? Some feeling of this kind underlies the uneasiness with which people watch the steady advance of Psychology into new realms of consciousness.

Now, here, we must recall the principle we laid down when discussing the miraculous—the fully known is never mysterious; what we call "the known" can only convey a sense of mystery if it contains a reference to an unknown background.

There are people, who say that things do not cease to be wonderful because they are completely understood. Certainly they can be admirable, ingenious, striking, like a well-constructed house or a perfectly organised department, but mysterious—no. Here there must be a limit at which knowledge fails. If it were possible, for instance, before I knelt down, so to watch my mind as to know exactly how I

should spend the time on my knees, the mystery would disappear.

Too often we can correctly anticipate what our times of devotion will be like and then how dull and dreary they are!—only endured as a preparation for something better.

It is a good thing to understand—as much and as deeply as we will, but, unless as our knowledge increases, our universe widens to keep pace with it, we shall suffer from the disease of our modern intellectuals and live in a world that is trivial because it is without mystery. We can take our illustration again from human personality; we can study all that is recorded of a figure in history; we can endeavour to understand his motives with all the evidence available, but we shall have felt none of that fascination which leads us to call him great, unless we feel there is more behind. It remains true as long as human nature does not change, that life would become intolerable to us without the expectation of something new. It is no good telling us that we ought to be content with what we fully understand; it is no good contrasting (as Aristotle does) the human restlessness that roves from one pleasure to another, with the Divine contemplation that is never satiated with its objects. The poet in us revolts, and though the human mind may weary of the fantastic nonsense offered by superstition, it will never rest contented with a Reason that has glib answers to every question:

"Just when we're safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides—

And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul.
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring
Round the ancient idol on his base again."

(Browning—" Bishop Blougram's Apology.")

It is true, no doubt, that Modern Science is far from professing to solve all problems; its own history has never proved more clearly that the more we discover, the more the problems that crowd the horizon. As for Psychology, as long as it is content with telling us after the event how brilliantly it could have predicted it, we need not be afraid of its ever making the world too small. But it is well to remind ourselves again and again that the great moments of life are the moments that no formula can cover. Psychology may throw more and more light on the workings of our minds, and for us such helps to self-knowledge are of the utmost value, but the moment new information ceases to point beyond itself, that moment life has become a tiresome puppet-show where we see all the wires; Religion is disproved—and much else with it.

The ultimate mysteries of Divine action—Grace and Free Will, God's fore-knowledge and real history, Divine election and human responsibility and the secret of secrets—how God Himself Eternal and perfect, can yet enter into the struggle of Time—these are mysterious, not because they are examples of laws we have not yet discovered, not because, like the distances of the stars, unknown to ancient astronomers, and known to us, they will be read, like an open book, by our more gifted descendants—

but in a far deeper and more religious sense. They are not stone walls, against which thought runs its head; they are joyful mysteries that call out in their finest form human belief, confidence and devotion.

How far these things would be mysterious for redeemed human nature in heaven " appeareth not yet "; the Catholic doctrine of the Invocation of saints (so beautifully illustrated throughout Dante's " Paradiso ") holds that the blessed ones see the truth in God; they draw knowledge from the Divine Omniscience as from a well. Here, at any rate, we are men and the choicest fruits of our character ripen in the shade. When Our Lord held up a little child as a pattern to His followers, He was thinking not only of the wonder with which childhood invests the world, but also of the trustfulness with which a child, hand in hand with a friend, goes out to face the unknown.

The thirst to know more, the joy of understanding are real, God-given gifts to the soul, but they only apply to that portion of the universe open to our observation; we do not (if we are wise or reverent) seek to comprehend the Whole; the mysteriousness of God's Being is not due to any defect in our philosophies which new methods will correct; the impulse to adore, the delight of the plunge into " the most ancient of all mysteries " is not a disease to be cured; it is the very condition of our spiritual health.

(2) *The Sacraments.*

In this section and the next we shall be consider-

ing two ways of expressing the mysterious, (1) by *action* (Symbols, Ceremonies, Sacraments); (2) by *stories* (Myth, Legend, Sacred Tale). It is clear at the outset that there will be a certain difficulty in expressing mystery, because it cannot by its very nature be represented by definite words standing for clear-cut conceptions.

Let us take as a sort of parable the teaching of children. Here we make them *do* things and we tell them *stories*, because as yet their intelligence is weak; so we start with what is much stronger in them—the desire for action and the power to retain pictures in the imagination. Let us consider, as an example, something that they will be able, more or less, to understand, when they grow up. Suppose we are trying to instill into their minds the idea of patriotism; we shall make them walk in processions, wave flags, sing national songs, stand up for the national anthem. We shall also tell them tales and show them pictures illustrating British heroism and British patriotism (alas, how much better equipped for this we are than for expressing the international idea!); later on, they will be able to understand, however inarticulately, *why* they love their country.

Now since a great part of Religion is to us far more mysterious than patriotism is to a child, it has to be expressed (*to* us by our teachers, *by* us as learners) by action and stories—the poetry of action and the poetry of words—the ceremony and the myth.

The Sacraments fall under the head of ceremonial —acts so done as to represent symbolically a mysterious unknown; as our Catechism says in an admirable

definition, they are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual graces.

But symbol is a somewhat slippery word; one can imagine an advocate of the symbolic view of the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, putting his case like this: "The mysterious fact of God's Omnipresence is one that we find it very hard to make real to ourselves; that He should be everywhere is, for our finite imaginations, almost the same as if He were nowhere. Now in the Holy Eucharist, we use the Bread and Wine as definite symbols of God's indefinable Omnipresence. We do not suppose that He is specially present here in the Bread and Wine, but we do mean that here, in this limited area we can realise His Presence more easily—therefore we use this part to make real to ourselves the whole, that is too vast for our apprehension."

This is not the place to enter into a discussion of Eucharistic doctrine, but if we were criticising the above explanation of the Real Presence, it would be necessary to point out that there are many different ways in which a sign can stand related to the thing signified; the distance between the two may be considerable; the written word or the uttered sound are not like the thoughts they call up or the actions that may result; but a handshake (as a symbol of friendship) is more than a mere convention; the physical contact may really convey strength and encouragement, and in some cases the two almost merge into one, as for example the gracious acts by which we express kindness to one another. This last case is especially true, when it is

the mysterious that is being symbolised, because here the relation itself makes a distinction between sign and thing somewhat difficult; words can be separated, with a little effort, from what they mean when that meaning is an idea, but words or musical sounds, which are "evocative" of something indefinite, are hard to tear apart from the mystery they suggest; we can define a word, that stands for a thought or a thing; we cannot define a Sacrament.

Now the Bread and Wine, after Consecration, stand for something that happens; the outward action means a spiritual action[1] with which it is united in that intimate relation we call Sacramental.

If it be said that nothing new or special *does* happen in the spiritual world corresponding to the Sacramental action; that it only symbolises in Time and Space what is an unchangeable fact and cannot "happen"—namely, the Divine Omnipresence, we can only ask the objector whether, if we think of God as active at all, we are not forced to think of Him as acting at special moments and in special places; our devotional life has such hours of visitation.

As to the Divine Omnipresence, if by "heaven" we mean "where God most fully is," surely it must be admitted that earth is not and cannot be continuously the same as Heaven; this life cannot become the next. Therefore the most fervent believer in

[1] It is one of the drawbacks of the doctrine of Transubstantiation that it concentrates attention on "things," as though something happened to them, while the rest of the universe looked on unconcerned. But, of course, the Eucharist is an action; the Elements are what they are because of the relation in which they stand to the action of the Church and the priest and Christ Himself.

the Divine Omnipresence here cannot really object to those glimpses of Heaven which the Eucharist opens to us. The offering, which we show forth, is the Divine Offering of Himself before the Throne. Thus what the Blessed Sacrament reveals is itself eternal and unchangeable; the times, the places, the manners in which the doors open to reveal it, are "special."

No doubt there are other ways of realising the mystery of God's Presence; for the saint every moment may be sacramental, but the Catholic teaching and experience is that the Holy Mysteries, in which the presence of the Unknown is so overpowering, helps to consecrate and hallow the occasions (different for different people) when familiar, everyday things are seen to be divine.

(3) *Doctrine of the Last Things.*

The second way in which we express mystery to ourselves or others, is by the story or myth; as Dr. Gore says: "We can only be told about the beginning or end of the world by means of stories." This is because, if we are to believe, we need to be able to use our imaginations and, to do that, we must have something concrete before us. We can enjoy abstractions, as in Mathematics, but this is, when what is before us is completely intelligible[1]; in order to imagine, we need pictures.

We too often confuse the imaginary with the false; the two are quite distinct, because, for a

[1] It is unfortunate that we sometimes use the word "abstractions" as meaning something mysterious; they are of course over-simplifications of the real; it is the concrete that is mysterious.

statement to be false, it must profess to be stating a fact, whereas a mental picture does not necessarily claim to be an exact copy of anything. No doubt when Sheridan said : " The Hon. Member is indebted to his memory for his jokes and to his imagination for his facts," he meant that the orator asserted that the pictures in his mind represented things ; but when (in Shaw's play) the doubter tells Joan of Arc that the voices she hears come from her imagination, she replies quite gravely and correctly that God always speaks through the imagination.

On the other hand, imagination has a truth of its own, though it is not the truth of fact ; it is not only a fantastic delight in rearranging ideas according to our own caprices. A great work of art (like " King Lear," or the " Divina Commedia ") is true as expressing certain ultimate facts about God and Man ; in this sense all great poetry and art are about Reality.

It is natural that Mystery should be the special sphere of the imagination ; where we cannot see, we make pictures ; where we cannot know, we tell stories.

Of course, Religion does not only need *imaginary* stories ; she does not diet herself entirely on fictions ; there must be facts as well and the religious mind often takes a long while to see the difference between the fact and the story (as in the Creation chapter of Genesis) ; it must also be remembered that you must have a solid foundation of fact to account for the fiction ; a real knowledge of God's action in the world underlies the narrative of the Fall ; the " Divina Commedia " could not have been

invented without the fact of Christianity. When we are trying to disentangle fact from legend it is a sound rule to lay down—Always leave enough fact to account for the legend having arisen.

If we consider as a special example Christian doctrine about the Last Things, we find ourselves in a realm where imagination is bound to be busy. The Second Coming indeed impinges upon history at a certain date and can therefore (up to a point) be regarded as a concrete, public event, but after that, when we pass to the wholly new conditions of Heaven and Hell, we have full freedom and scope for the construction of mental pictures. It is well, perhaps, at this point, to remind ourselves of the part which such pictures play in giving content to our beliefs. Suppose we were to make the experiment of dismissing as unworthy and misleading all the language of our hymns and all our images of the other life, and simply regarding it as an unknowable state of perfection, we should at once lose grip on our belief in immortality, however sincerely it might be held. Some might urge, of course, that such a result is desirable, that it is an unhealthy thing either in our own case or that of our friends to let the mind dwell on the other world,[1] and no doubt a sober reticence is characteristic of Our Lord's language about it, but if we are to think about it at all, we must use our imaginations.

[1] This argument is often used by orthodox people against Spiritualism. No doubt it is true that certain temperaments need more luxurious scenery for their devotional life than others (cp. the Italian pantheon of saints), but it cannot be our duty never to think of our loved ones who are departed and, if we do, we must use images. Our Lord Himself made use of the pictures of His day (mostly from apocalyptic literature) when speaking of the Last Things.

Christianity has always been faced by two opposite dangers. Either people have tended to picture the life to come too concretely or else, in violent reaction, they have made it abstract and unreal. We do not want to be presented with a mixture of a Millenium and a Utopia, when the saints shall have a good time, nor are we reassured by messages from beyond the veil telling us that " there are baths hot and cold, over here " ; yet we are equally discontented with some disembodied Nirvana, where we shall none of us know the other and all be on the edge of absorption into some eternal sleep. St. Paul's doctrine of the " spiritual body " is an attempt to steer between these two rocks.[1]

When we say that what we are told about Heaven and Hell are pictures and stories, we do not mean that they are old wives' tales or violently coloured illustrations from some Family Bible. It may be Dante who tells the story, or Fra Angelico who paints the picture and then the Holy Spirit is certainly teaching us.

It is true, of course, that pictures may get too great a hold upon us ; then we want a return to first principles and a new imaginative re-creation. But, if rightly used, the great merit of the picture-story is that the very wealth of concrete detail brings out the fact of the underlying mystery.

" They gardens and thy gallant walks
Continually are green
There grow such sweet and pleasant flowers

[1] The doctrine of a spiritual resurrection comes from our Lord's own Teaching ; He steers between the materialistic view of the risen Body (sneeringly ascribed to the Pharisees by the Sadducees) and their own denial of any " rising again."

As nowhere else are seen ;
There cinnamon, there sugar grows
There nard and balm abound
What tongue can tell, what heart conceive
The joys that there are found ? "

Such lines are much less likely to be taken literally than a serious psychological attempt to represent what Heaven will feel like.[1]

It may be added that images which are grey and transparent are not more fitted to represent the spiritual than images which are rich and full-blooded. Ethereal mists and dreamy sounds are just as material as golden pavements. It is true that Dante uses music and light to construct his Paradiso, but most of his pictures have shape and could be drawn.

Finally we must remember that we cannot use pictures to represent what we know nothing whatever about. Mystery, in the sense we have been using the word, is not the completely unknown ; in the case of the life to come, our knowledge consists of moral and spiritual intuitions, about the character of God and human perfection ; the part of the intellect is to remove anything that is absurd, immoral, and self-contradictory. We might lay down the following four tests for a good picture of Heaven :

It must be in harmony with out highest ideas of God ; notice how in the Paradiso, though in one

[1] I do not wish to exclude the idea that Heaven might ultimately include this earth glorified and in a sense might contain cinnamon and nard, but the hymn-writer was thinking of something that the saints are enjoying *now* (though the earth is not glorified) and the joy he means is not *merely* delight in smell or sight.

sense God is the centre *to* which Dante is moving, we yet feel that His Presence pervades the whole.

It must not shock our moral convictions—as does Tertullian's picture of the saved rejoicing over the lost. It must not be intellectually inferior to the life we know here; thus Heaven as an eternity of doing nothing or of twanging harps would be an everlasting ennui; though the pictures in question may be derived from the Book of Revelation, it cannot be said that that work conveys the idea of a Heaven that is dull and colourless. Popular misunderstandings of hymns are responsible for much in this line.

It must be beautiful; this is the origin of the prominence of music.[1] Some people feel that the pictures in the Book of Revelation are too much like a jeweller's shop (but precious stones *are* very beautiful) and prefer such simple images as "Heaven will be like a summer's day, but there will be no curse and we shall see God."

[1] Not (as has been suggested) because singing stands for ideal self-expression, but because the beauty of Music makes it fit to be offered to God.

(*a*) *On Bad Mysteries.*

WE have not touched upon the question of evil mysteries; St. Paul's phrase "mystery of iniquity," as we have seen, probably refers to the coming "showing-up" of Satan in all his badness. Probably the phrase in the Revelation "the deep things of Satan" (*τα βαθέα του Σατνα*) —put in the mouth of the woman Jezebel and her party at Thyatira—comes nearest to it. There is no a priori reason why the Unknown should not contain evil beyond our conceiving. Religion itself has often been a force that had no connection with goodness; a strong sense of the supernatural does not necessarily imply any standard of morality and the primitive fear of the Numinous is as instinctive as hunger and as immoral. Even Theism has been quite as prone to allow evil in the supernatural world as in the natural.

A case might be made out (on the lines of the argument in this book) for the existence of diabolical powers; it might be said that a sense of mystery has always haunted man's conflict with evil, which points to something beyond; it might be said that psychologically St. Paul's trumpet-call (Eph. vi, 12): "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood" widens the universe and braces our nerves for a battle, in which cosmic issues are at stake.

It is not our purpose here to discuss the existence of the Devil; two points may be mentioned.

(*a*) Even those who deny the existence of supernatural powers of evil, would probably admit that Religion always invests evil with a mysterious significance. Wrong-doing becomes sin with far-reaching consequences in the unseen world; a sense of defilement and a longing for purification is produced that is not quite the same as moral self condemnation, for the defilement may be purely ritual and the purification purely magical. Eternal punishment (it might be added) is a mysterious symbol of the abiding consequences of Sin.

(*b*) Those, who do believe in evil mysteries, would see in them (as early Christians saw in the pagan Mysteries) a hateful caricature of the good; there are the fiendish counterparts of "numinous" emotions—unholy fear, unhealthy joy and unhallowed knowledge; the Black Mass testifies to the fact that Man at his most degraded does not always lose his taste for the supernatural.

The "unholy numinous" can only be distinguished from the Holy by the fruits it brings forth—in the same way as the mystics sorted out genuine visions from hallucinations: "Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John iv, 1).

(*b*) *Mystery in the Philosophers.*

In Ancient Philosophy, Plato has most evidently the sense of a mystery at the heart of things; it was this side of him, as expressed on the Myths and the phrase in the Republic about the Good being

beyond existence (*επέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*) that the Neoplatonists developed; Plotinus represents most perfectly the alliance of philosophy with the mysterious. Aristotle prefers precise definitions and a universe tidily arranged.

In Modern philosophy, the Cartesians, with their clear and distinct ideas as the only way to truth, had little use for mystery; in fact, Descartes is not a little embarassed, when as a Catholic he had to deal with the mysteries of the faith; he has to get out of the difficulty by saying that, while their content is obscure, the grounds on which they are believed are clear and distinct.

With Spinoza we get highly developed the tendency latent in Rationalism to regard mystery as due to our befogged understanding; above the mists, the Truth shines like the heaven for clearness; mystery is on our side of the line rather than beyond.

In British Empiricism—with its national qualities of caution and restraint—we find a very strong feeling of ultimate mystery. Locke believes that reason is given us to walk by rather than to probe to the bottom of things; Berkeley's Theism leaves the world in the hands of an arbitrary Will, tempered by consideration for our moral needs; Hume is beset by insoluble problems, only he was rather too lighthearted about it all to have a very deep sense of mystery.

Kant left large room for mystery in his doctrine of Things in themselves, but he put them so far beyond knowledge that a reaction was bound to follow. Hegelianism, expounding the history of the universe in terms of the Dialectic movement,

marked a great revival of the will to understand, but English supporters of the Absolute (such as Bradley and Bosanquet) showed both by precept and example their belief in ultimate mystery.

The Neo-Idealism of Croce and Gentile finds a place for the Unknown in the potentialities of Spirit, but it always tends to limit it by identifying the activity of Spirit with the history of this planet. Such Realism as that of Professor Alexander finds mystery only in the evolutionary future when Deity shall " emerge."

PART THREE

THE MYSTERIOUS AND THE SUPERNATURAL

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYSTERIOUS AND THE SUPERNATURAL

DURING the greater part of this little book, we have been stressing the importance and value of mystery; we have been urging that Man only makes himself ridiculous, when he claims to be the centre of the universe; it does not need a religious sense (common sense is enough) to see the absurdity of such utterances, as "Glory to Man in the highest, for Man is the master of things," or "The Heavens are telling the glory of Kepler."[1]

The War has completely sundered us from such Victorian optimism; whether we find the world trivial or profound, it is the fashion to find it unintelligible; for this reason it will be well for us, in this concluding chapter, to begin by reminding our selves of the dangers of an excessive love of mystery, as shown in the two different forms of Agnosticism and Mysticism.

(1) *Agnosticism.*

In the full sense of the term, Agnosticism finds nothing but Mystery everywhere; our faculties (it

[1] This absence of Mystery is the reason why Positivism has never been successful in creating a religion of humanity; as the French lady said of it: "Une religion sans Dieu! Mon Dieu! quelle religion!"

is held) cannot pierce through to things, as they really are; we are surrounded by appearances; we know not whence we come nor whither we go; all we seem to know—even of that fringe which *does* seem within our grasp—may be a delusion, and we are on the edge of a universal scepticism, for which "perception is a dream, and thought the dream of a dream."[1]

By falling into scepticism, Agnosticism falls into the old difficulties. "If I know I am deceived, how can I be deceived?" "If I say I know nothing, I assert the existence of myself and attribute certain qualities to it." "If falsehood and truth cannot be distinguished, it *may* be false that I know nothing." We have seen, again and again, that absolute and complete mystery is self-contradictory; the Unknown only has meaning as contrasted with the known.

But we are less concerned here with logical than with moral and æsthetic consequences; if mystery is a good thing for testing our faith, if it makes life more significant and opens up new horizons, if it breeds reverence and holy fear, why not have as much of it as possible? Is not the Agnostic strengthening our moral fibre and pleasing our artistic taste for ciaroscuro by multiplying the shadows? Is he not right in surrounding our little island of light (even engulfing it) in the ocean of surrounding darkness? Is it not true humility to say that we know just enough of Reality to know

[1] The compromise, that we know only appearances and not Reality, will not hold; if (in the case of a person) I hear his words and see his gestures and yet cannot guess at all what he is like, can I be said in *any* sense to know him?

that we cannot understand it? Ought not a Christian to be the first to believe that he cannot really understand the articles of his faith?

To consider the moral effects of such a view, let us take the case of Courage; it has been urged that such a virtue is most resplendent in the twilight. Is not a man more brave, who confronts death not knowing what awaits him, than one who is sure of God and Heaven? Much is said about the importance of "adventurousness"; and the lover of adventure will welcome mysteries; it is even said that Jesus "made the experiment of trusting Reality"; if He did not know if such an experiment was justified or not, the braver was His action.

It is clear that this thirst for the unknown goes far beyond what the Christian means by faith. Mere rashness is folly, not adventurousness; an experiment not based on a serious consideration of the nature of Reality is unnatural[1]; when we say that we trust God's goodness, we do not mean that we are paying no attention to the facts whatever. If mere adventurousness were enough, where were the need for wisdom and experience?

As a matter of fact this exaltation of Courage as the chief of the virtues, if it follows its latent tendency, ends in Atheism, much as Agnosticism of the intellect ends in Scepticism. If Courage shines

[1] When, I wonder, will common sense return to us on this point? We are still under an obsession that it is specially fine to believe in an ideal, if it is hopeless, but, if we take the example of "believing" in human nature, we see that it means believing that certain facts about human nature *are true;* it would be absurd to appeal to the highest in human nature if we did not hope and believe that there was such a thing.

most brightly, the darker the surroundings, let us make them as dark as possible; let us put out the light and replace uncertainty by Mr. Bertrand Russell's "unyielding despair." But this attitude (whatever other merits it may have) has no connection with the Unknown; the universe is known and known to be hateful; there is no mystery about hopelessness.

We have said a good deal, in our treatment of mystery, about æsthetic experience, because it is disinterested; one can study it without appearing to be grinding any moral or theological axe. We have seen that no great expression of mystery in literature is possible without a sense of tremendous import. A trivial universe can have no real mysteries at its heart; there is nothing sublime about "a sphinx without a secret." Sometimes this sense of greatness may take refuge in the human soul as a revolt against Reality, but more often great art effects a reconciliation between the Divine within us and the Divine in the world.

In æsthetic experience, too, complete mystery cuts its own throat; too many shadows spoil the picture; underneath what we do not know we must suspect or guess or believe that there is hidden something worth our knowing.

(2) *Mysticism.*

I feel rather reluctant to add this section, because the word Mysticism has been used to cover so vast an area that it seems to include at once the most esoteric of experiences, and what is an indispensable element even in a beginner's prayers; if we

were to distinguish it from Agnosticism by calling it a way of approaching Reality, not through reason, but through feeling, we should still have to recognise that such a phrase covers the orgiastic rites of a Dionysiac, the hymn-loving sentimentality of many congregations and the attitude to religion of most ordinary people, who are not theologians. Again, if we were to call it an over-exaltation of the *personal* point of view, we should have to remember that many great mystics have not felt that their way of life was meant for all Christians, and that many defenders of Mysticism in a broad sense would say that the capacity for it is latent in everyone. To speak of Mysticism as a school of thought is probably as misleading as to speak of a school of "Poet-ism." There are poets and there are mystics each expressing a very personal and individual part of themselves.

From our point of view the danger is apt to be a "specialisation" of the mysterious; the tendency to regard it as confined to certain people or to certain moods. This is what one sometimes feels about Professor Otto; he is indeed right in recognising a unique and indefinable sense of mystery as of the essence of Religion, and seeing it in sharp contrast to the natural, but he sometimes seems to point the contrast so sharply that we get, on the one side, a wholly rational and intelligible world, and, on the other, the wholly Numinous—but *all things* fade off into mystery. There is no one-way road to the Divine: whatever route we choose, sooner or later we climb to the level where the clouds begin to gather; our theories of the world fail

finally to explain; our moral rules seem petty and artificial; our highest forms of artistic expression seem strangely inadequate—and that not because, beyond what we know, there lies more information to which we have, as yet, no access, but because we feel a sense of the Infinite overpowering the finite. Whenever those experiences come (and they come of course most vividly to the mystic) there comes the tendency to lose grip on the finite as being too trivial for our attention; words and ideas seem indescribably inadequate; even moral duties appear mean and small; all earthly conditions seem petty and degrading and we feel (as in Eastern Pantheism) the lure of the Infinite.

Such a tendency the whole Sacramental discipline of the Catholic Church is designed to combat; it drives the mystic back to ordinary duties, regularly done side by side with ordinary people; it insists that true humility is not self-annihilation before the Infinite, but loving service of God and Man; that Jesus Christ showed us the care of the most Highest for little things—birds and flowers; that a feeling is not necessarily holy because it is inexpressible nor an experience mysterious because it cannot be shared. Our personal experiences, however vivid, must conform to the common sense of the Church.

Here then again we have arrived at the conclusion that though there is a background of mystery to all things, it is as well that the background should not become the foreground.

(3) *Rationalism.*

I take Rationalism not as a school of thought,

but as a tendency to dislike, mistrust and dispel mystery; when an Anglo-Catholic friend of mine ventured to criticise some point in Otto, he was at once denounced as a Rationalist!

The world owes much to the brave men who have destroyed bogus-mysteries, who have let light into the dark places of the human mind, who have shown that, what people attributed to the inexplicable wrath of Heaven, was really due to bad drains, bad conditions, bad habits. They have been such benefactors that we will not even add a qualifying "but." Rather we will say that they would have been the first to admit that such explanations as they achieved, while they illuminated corners of the world did not pretend to illuminate all reality. We see vaguely what are the conditions that attend disease; why there should be disease at all is not a question that the scientist professes to have answered. Whatever view may be held as to the nature of ultimate Reality, it cannot surely be maintained that it is simple, or that the answer to our ultimate problems is one that a little more ingenuity could supply. The talents of our greatest minds, every kind of endowment and ability have been lavished on the problem of life; it cannot be surely for want of correct reasoning that we still differ in our interpretations. Only something amazingly rich and complex could have at once satisfied and eluded our noblest thinkers.

There is a modern tendency to create a Religion of Science; whatever its tenets may be, it must have mystery somewhere if it is to be a religion. There is here a dilemma which must be faced;

if the world as we look at it is evidently a puzzle, and if we dismiss the suggestion that we have overlooked the clue, through pure stupidity, the difficulty of understanding must be *either* because it eludes our faculties (and then we must find room for mystery) or because there is no solution at all—and in that case there is no religion.

Some people, while admitting to the full that at present we see through a glass darkly, have urged that the mystery is on our side because of the cloud that rests on our eyes; some day (whether by gradual progress here or in a life to come) the veil will be removed and mystery be no more.

What may be the goal of human thought beyond the grave we cannot of course say, but it is perhaps worth while to remind ourselves of one or two points.

What do we really mean by the ideal of a complete explanation of all things? What kind of answers would satisfy us, as being final and ultimate? No doubt there is the longing of the scientist to know chemical and astronomical secrets; there is the curiosity of the ordinary man as to what happens after death, but there are also deep moral questionings—the why of pain and sorrow, the why of my own destiny, the why of all creation, the divine event towards which it moves; this "Knowing as I am known," to which St. Paul looks forward, means not primarily having correct theories about the atom or the nature of Space (it may include that; Dante's first question in Heaven was, Why are there spots on the moon?) but rather the justification of life. We have believed here by faith—not,

of course, against the evidence, but at any rate against formidable evidence—that the world is a manifestation of love ; there, we shall see it. For a Christian that means knowing Jesus Christ, for to know Love is only possible by personal relationship to Him.

That is the justification for which we hope ; just as children, when they are grown up, see that the education they have received (if it was a wise one) was justified. But that of course by no means guarantees omniscience ; we shall remain ourselves ; it is likely, for instance, that however close we are to our brothers and sisters in the Church triumphant, there will be in the soul of others always something of a mystery, without which they could not be " others " to us at all.

In any case, without attempting any such strain of high fantasy, we know (even in this life) that, in using our minds, we aspire not only to be clever, ingenious and witty, to be inventors, discoverers, creators—but also to be *wise*—that is to take up the right attitude to life as a whole. One great element in such wisdom which distinguishes it from mere cleverness, is reverence and reverence implies mystery.

(4) *Conclusion.*

At the end of a book like this, one feels that all the see-saw of rival considerations, the attempt to be fair to both the claims and the limitations of the understanding, to define where the mysterious is in its proper place, and where it intrudes and disturbs —all this may lead the reader to a final state of

indecision. It is easier, of course, to lay all the emphasis on some one-sided formula, the " Slay me in the light " of the Rationalist, or Pascal's " The heart has its reasons which the Reason cannot know " but slogans are not, in the end, much help, when it is the truth one is looking for.

Let us attempt a kind of summary.

We said, then, that there were two passions in the human heart, both planted in it by the Creator—the passion to understand and the passion to adore. We said that they must work together, but that like so many other things, they best work together, when they are kept separate.

To attempt to understand without adoration is to put a strain on human nature which it will not stand ; it is the sin of Pride, mystically represented by Lucifer, and haunting the human conscience in such figures as Faust and Paracelsus..

It is a self-contradictory ideal, because to know all would be to cease to be human and become God. It is a self-distorting ideal, because the human faculty of wonder and reverence must not be starved. Browning illustrates this very beautifully, when he represents the great thinker, Paracelsus, realising on his death-bed that, what he lacks, is just the simple love of the poet Aprile.

To adore without trying to understand is also no ideal for Man ; it is a creed for slaves not for those, whom Jesus called His Friends. It is so easy to worship " we know not what " to set up in our hearts some idol, enshrined in the dark and left in the dark. The doctrine that, the less we understand a thing, the more divine it is, is the mother of

superstition and cruelty; when the priest says: "The god wills this," there is no court of appeal to our hearts or our heads.

The Catholic Church ought therefore to find room for the fullest and freest enquiry; she may well, from her experience, warn enquirers of the direction they are taking; she may well protect those of her children, who are better equipped for praying than understanding, against those who are better equipped for understanding than praying. Yet religious people need, above all, the warning against sluggish acquiescence in "mysteries" they are too timid to explore. Our temptations to omniscience are few; our temptations to idleness and slipshod thinking are many.

In the Church of England, we have been called by our Archbishops to the duty of sacred study; as we face that call, we shall find our minds stocked with all kinds of mysteries that are really muddles. Modes of action or reflection, much beyond the familiar compass of our minds, seem to us mysterious, mathematical reckonings to the non-mathematician, or chemical formulæ to the layman, the productions of genius to ordinary people. We cannot imagine how they are done; in superstitious ages, people either suspected or adored those who had exceptional powers. But if we are wise, we shall not put the great statesman, the great poet, the great artist into a kind of supernatural category; such popular canonisations place too great an interval between those who create and those who enjoy fine things—an interval bad for both; especially is this true of Religion; we think that

when we have called somebody a saint and put a halo round him, we have discharged all responsibility; we venerate St. Joan, but we don't want her back.

No such false sense of mystery blinds the people who really love art and holiness; they love great men and women because they express, and by expressing redeem and ennoble, our common humanity.

The democratic revolt against mystery as hocus-pocus is justified if it is directed against the view that Mystery is the monopoly of a class—nobles or kings or priests, but it becomes vulgar if it does not appreciate the mystery in all men.[1]

There are of course plenty of other "mysteries" in our minds that are due to our laziness; we have neglected this or that plot of ground, and it has become tangled and overgrown; if we could suppose —per impossible—a person who had no such uncultivated spots in his mind, who knew all that is to be known (I mean the sum of present knowledge—all that anybody knows anywhere at the moment), we should not find that his mind was lacking in mysteries, only that they came in different places, when compared with our minds; all kind of things that puzzle us about the planets (for instance) would be clear to his comprehensive mind, but I suppose he would have more—not less—sense than we have of the mystery of the Heavens.

"The more we know, the more we should wonder," and that because beyond anything we can imagine

[1] Someone wisely said that when we say, "How wonderful the wireless is!" we ought to reflect that it is merely a physical extension of what is the real miracle—that we hear at all; how *far* we can hear is a very secondary marvel.

ourselves as knowing in our most exalted moments there stretches all that which we leave in humble submission to a Higher Power. To seek to understand is of the essence of human dignity, but to want to understand everything is to desire to be God and not Man.

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